Progress and prejudice Volume 1

Gore, Mrs. (Catherine Grace Frances), 1799-1861

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PROGRESS AND PREJUDICE.

BY MRS. GORE.

"Aloof, with hermit eye, I scan
The present deeds of present man."

COLERIDGE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1854.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

PROGRESS AND PREJUDICE.

CHAPTER I.

It was a happy day at Meadowes Court;—a day long looked for, come at last;—the seventeenth birthday of the only daughter,—nay, the only child—of the house; who, from her earliest girlhood, had been promised that, on entering her eighteenth year, she should be emancipated from the trammels of the governess, and introduced into society; that is, as far as comported with the facilities of a neighbourhood, where society, according to fashionable interpretation, there was none.

There was, however, all that Amy Meadowes desired. She had heard no description, and by indiscriminate reading acquired no suspicion of any species of social order more brilliant than was presented by their obscure parish; and what she chiefly ambitioned, in emerging from the school-room and getting rid of Miss Honeywood, was to devote herself exclusively to a dear, good mother, who had been prevented by prolonged ill-health from usurping the functions of the unpopular individual, in whose disappearance from Meadowes Court, the preceding day, more than half poor Amy's present delight originated.

So long as she could remember, Lady Meadowes had been confined to a suite of rooms on the ground-floor of her old-fashioned home: so long as she could remember,—because the delicacy of constitution which rendered her mother so close a prisoner, dated from the hour of her birth. But though a recluse, that kind mother was by no means a gloomy one. Incapable of physical exertion, she was fully equal to the management of their small household;

and all that could be accomplished by pen and ink, by careful computation and careful regulation, was done to perfect the economy of a moderate fortune, in connection with an honourable name and a residence of ancient repute in the county.

The baronets of England are in general a wealthy race, and predominate among our landed gentry. Unluckily, Sir Mark Meadowes was an exception. His daughter Amy knew only that his income was limited; and that hence arose the scantiness of their household, and shabbiness of their household gear. Their neighbours, had she been permitted to gossip with them, could, however, have informed her that, on attaining his majority, the rent-roll of her father trebled its present amount. At that time, he was involved in a vortex of fashionable dissipation, dicing, drinking, and squandering, in rivalship or imitation of Fox, Sheridan, and the orgies of Carlton House; so that it was as wonderful as fortunate that even Meadowes Court, and its eight hundred acres, remained for the support of the family. That they did

so, was generally ascribed to the influence of his wife. From the day of their marriage, Sir Mark had become an altered man; contenting himself with the homely, homestaying, happy life of a sporting country squire.

Many people asserted, on the other hand, that the old family mansion would have passed into the hands of usurers and Jews with the rest of the property, but for a strict entail upon his heirs male. This, however, could scarcely be the case. For when, after ten long years of expectation, little Amy made her appearance, so far from lamenting, as was generally expected, their disappointment of a son and heir, the parents welcomed their little girl as the greatest of blessings.

Nothing therefore was left for officious neighbours but to take it for granted that, though the old baronetcy, failing male issue to Sir Mark, would devolve upon a distant cousin, the estates must be heritable in the female line. And when it became apparent, from the infirm health of Lady Meadowes, that there was no likelihood of future olive-branches to exclude

the sunshine dawning upon the little heiress, they eventually adopted her, as her parents had done from love at first sight, as their pet and darling.

From the period of her birth, the health of Lady Meadowes never rallied. Though cheerful, and at times capable of carriage-exercise, she was chiefly confined to her sofa; and her husband lost in her that daily companion of his rides and walks, who had rendered his first ten years of married life an earthly paradise.

But from the moment Amy was able to manage a pony, or adapt her little steps to his own, she had been promoted by Sir Mark to the vacant place by his side; and soon progressed into just such an active, lithe-limbed being, as constant exercise, in all weathers, was likely to create.

To her mother, meanwhile, the cheerful, bright-eyed child was an invaluable companion. The pursuits of Sir Mark, both as a sportsman and farmer, were of too engrossing a nature not to leave the invalid frequently alone; and

the prattle of the little girl served to lighten her solitude, till that serious age arrived, when the formation of her daughter's character afforded a still more interesting occupation. Willingly would Lady Meadowes have monopolized the task, and wholly undertaken her education. But Dr. Burnaby, a neighbouring physician, whose authority at Meadowes Court was secondary only to its master's, pronounced the task too trying for one so delicate; and a competent governess was found, who, for ten ensuing years, had experienced some difficulty in obtaining as much of her pupil's time and attention as would enable her to do what *she* considered credit to them both.

It was a hard matter to withdraw little Amy from the ailing mother, who wanted to be talked to, and read to, and fondled; and still harder, to convince the rough outspoken Sir Mark, that a lesson of Ancient History signified more than a wholesome gallop on the banks of the Severn; and it is questionable, on the whole, whether the parents or their child experienced most satisfaction, on seeing

the carriage return empty after conveying Miss Honeywood, for the last time, to the neighbouring station.

They had parted, however, with mutual kindness, and mutual respect. The good woman, so large a portion of whose life had been devoted to inform the mind of the heiress of Meadowes Court, carried away with her the best proof of the gratitude of the family, in the shape of an annuity as liberal as comported with their moderate means; and there was consequently no drawback upon Amy's delightful consciousness of liberation. Miss Honeywood was gone to be idle and happy, among her relations; and *she* remained free and happy —oh! how free, oh! how happy,—among her own. Her mother never would feel lonely again; her father would never plead vainly for her company in his rides and walks. She should be always with one or the other: doubly enjoying her sedentary pursuits by her mother's side,—doubly enjoying the pleasures of a country-life, under the protection of the kind, merry, jovial Sir Mark.

Any body intent upon her movements might have fancied that Amy was viewing for the first time the beauties of Meadowes Court, on the sunny morning in June we have been describing. While the dew was yet on the grass, she had visited every nook in the shrubberies; every flowery parterre, glowing like an inserted gem amid the rich verdure of the western lawn. She had stood gazing, with her arms resting on the iron fence, upon the well-wooded paddock, which a more pretending man than Sir Mark would have dignified with the name of park; admiring the morning light that tinged with silver the glossy bolls of the ancient beech-trees, forming not only the beautiful avenue, but, in scattered groups, the most picturesque ornament of the domain. The summer grass was high;—noisy with insects, fragrant with clover, and enamelled with the blue blossoms of the wild veronica. All was gay, all was sweet; as if to do honour to the auspicious epoch of Amy's birthday.

It was the seventeenth she had spent upon that self-same spot. But of those within her

memory, which had been so bright as this? The same flowers must have been in bloom:—the same birds singing in the bushes:—the same insects chirping in the grass, or hovering in the sunshine:—the same cows grouped heavily under the beech-trees:—the same pale water-flowers cresting the stagnant old moat. But till now, they had been mute and colourless. Till now, nothing had knocked at Amy's heart with the earnestness which, at that moment, brought a flush to her cheek, and a tremour to her lip, as she acknowledged to herself that she had not a wish unfulfilled in the world.

By the time her parents were astir, and she had been embraced and congratulated, she was almost tired out by the varying emotions agitating her frame. The good-will of the faithful old servants, the noisy caresses of her father's favourite dogs, even the importunities of her pet mare, accustomed to be fed from her hand and thrust its nose in search of sugar into her apron-pocket, seemed to demonstrate their sympathy in the grand event of the day; and when required to be grateful for a beautiful pearl necklace—a

family treasure, bestowed by her father, and a charming writing-desk prepared and filled for her by the dearest of mothers, Amy had scarcely voice to be thankful. After taking part with both in the breakfast to which her hives furnished the honey-comb, and her dairy contributed the butter and cream, she felt as if Time could yield no second birthday equal to that which brought such tears of joy into the eyes of her darling invalid,—such smiles of exultation into the joyous face of Sir Mark.

As the day progressed from dewy morn into burning noon, and from burning noon into that gradual lengthening of the shadows which enabled the neighbouring families to afford their tribute of gratulation on a family event so long anticipated in their little circle, there arrived the clergyman of the parish of Radensford, old Mr. Henderson, with the young though widowed daughter who kept house for him; and soon afterwards, the pony-chaise and barouche of the Tremenheeres and Warnefords,—the only two families within visiting distance of Meadowes Court; the former con-

taining Admiral Tremenheere and his spinster niece ;—the latter, Lady Harriet Warneford and a batch of grandchildren. Amy had to be kissed again and again, and passed from hand to hand like a picture-book or a new toy. For the *cadeaux*, lavished upon her by these kind friends, she felt perhaps less grateful than she ought. The one great gift of liberty,—the right of being allowed, henceforward, to think and feel for herself,—to think and feel as a woman,—superseded all other joys ; and when she sat down quietly to dinner with her father and mother, after the departure of their guests, she could scarcely believe, the excitement of the day being over, that she had attained a new phase of her existence. Except that her cheeks were burning from too much talking and her ears confused by too much listening, she was obliged to admit that she felt very much as she had done the preceding day.

Her father, indeed, saw her in a different light ; and on crowning his Amy's health, when the servants left the room, with a fond embrace, wondered he had never before noticed the ex-

quisite beauty of the daughter who seemed suddenly to have started into life. Lady Meadowes, on the contrary, though she united her pious benediction with that of her husband, scarcely seemed to see that Amy was present. She *felt* it, however, to the innermost core of her heart.

When her sofa was rolled nearer the windows opening to the lawn, that she might enjoy the fragrant twilight, and the single vivid evening star, whose reflection trembled on the surface of the old moat, she gathered up her darling's hand into her own, and thought she had never in her life felt so completely happy.

Amy's birthdays had usually been days of pleasantness and peace. But this, oh! this was the sweetest and pleasantest of them all!—

CHAPTER II.

Had the neighbourhood of Meadowes Court contained within its range any people of what is called the world, right puzzled would they have been to discover in what consisted the new charm which poor Amy discovered in her daily life It could not be the privilege of conferring with the old housekeeper, and patiently balancing her perplexed accounts. It could not be the pleasure of ambling by her father's side on her beautiful mare, for that she had enjoyed for more than a year past. As to the sensation of being what is called "out," so eventful to young ladies on the eve of presentation, and the brilliant fêtes of which that ceremony constitutes

the initiatory rite, what could it signify to a girl within reach of only a few homely family-dinners; where nothing of the male gender ever appeared more attractive than the lame curate of a neighbouring parish, or younger than Sir Mark Meadowes and Dr. Burnaby.

But if this absence of recreation or excitement rendered it difficult to conceive the rapture of Miss Meadowes on finding herself a privileged member of society, it accounted for the perfect satisfaction of her parents. They hailed her as a woman, without fear of losing her as a child. No Romeo was at hand, to climb their orchard wall, in search of their idolised Juliet! Not a regiment quartered within fifty miles of Meadowes Court! Not an assize town within ten miles' distance. She might as well have been immured in a convent, for any danger of a hero to the romance of her girlish life. Even the distant cousin, who, on the demise of Sir Mark, was to succeed to his baronetcy, was a married colonel of Militia, residing in a remote county.

There was, consequently, no drawback upon

Lady Meadowes's satisfaction when the Tremenheeres and the Rector's daughter, Mrs. Burton, remarked, almost every time they found her alone, that Amy was daily growing prettier and prettier. The happy mother knew that all this youthful loveliness was expanding only for the delight of her parents. No fear, at present, of losing their pet lamb.

Lady Harriet Warneford, who resided on a small estate, divided from that of Meadowes Court by a ragged strip of the royal forest of Burdans—a woman so advanced in life as to have survived her husband and eldest son, and to be presiding over the education of the three orphans of the latter,—could not help wondering, at times, at the indifference exhibited by Lady Meadowes and her husband, to their daughter's establishment in life. For her own sad experience of the uncertainty of life suggested that the death of Amy's parents might leave this fair young girl alone in a world, where youth and beauty so rare as hers demand a double share of protection.

She had not yet ventured, however, to broach

the subject to the invalid. The amiable, uncomplaining Lady Meadowes was a person to whom her friends, nay, even her acquaintances, were careful to avoid risking a moment's pain. As to Sir Mark, you might as well have attempted to fling a black crape veil over the face of the sun as to pretend to darken *his* joyous impulses by a serious reflection. While Amy herself, whenever Lady Harriet came to pass a day with them, was so full of devices to amuse and please her little grandchildren, that it was impossible to hazard a word capable of overclouding her innocent heart.

It was really a happy and sociable neighbourhood; happy and sociable because limited in extent, and assimilated in rank and fortune. No disproportion, no envy, no jealousy. A country circle of this description is now rare to be found in wealthy, fussy, railroad-riven England. People go too much to London, too often to the continent, to maintain those obsolete district sympathies which, in the days of our grandfathers and grandmothers, were fostered by interchange of newspapers—recipes—patterns of man-

tuas and tambouring—and cuttings of myrtles and thrift. We are grown more locomotive, more enlightened, more grand, and more selfish.

Miss Tremenheere, a damsel on the peevish side of thirty, and much addicted to moral reflection, sometimes whispered primly to Mrs. Burton, who, though a widow and a mother, was several years her junior, that Amy Meadowes's seventeenth birthday had done little to endow her with fixity of purpose; and that her parents were much to blame for not bringing her more decidedly face to face with the stern realities of life. But the young widow, to whom that cheerful girl was endeared by a thousand acts of kindness towards herself and her sickly little girl, could see no fault in her. So long as Amy fulfilled her duties in life with care and love, it mattered little that she had always a song upon her lips; or that she ran forward to meet her friends, when a better-regulated young lady would have advanced with decent deliberation.

One of Amy's chief in-door pleasures was to read to her mother while she worked. Like

the gentle lady wedded to the Moor, and most women condemned to a sedentary life, Lady Meadowes was "delicate with her needle;" and never had it moved with half so much alacrity as now that her daughter, with her silver voice and intuitive taste, was ever at hand to cheer her with the pages of some favourite work. Sometimes, indeed, Amy, with the versatility of her age, would pause in the midst of an interesting passage; and, laying down the book, interrupt herself by comments or questions;—usually suggested by the passage before her:—oftener, by her own vague and wandering fancies.

"How strange it seems, mamma," said she, one day, when they had been surrounded for nearly an hour with the extensive family-group of one of Richardson's novels, "that not only am I an only child—no brother, no sister to keep me company,—but that you and papa should also be in the same predicament!"

Lady Meadowes worked on in silence. She did not appear in the humour for conversation. Perhaps the inmates of Uncle Selby's cedar

parlour engrossed her attention more than they had done that of her daughter.

"It would have been so pleasant to have a cousin Lucy Selby or two, to come and stay with us here;—or at least to supply friends and correspondents. Not to fall in love with and marry, however, dear mamma, as poor Lady Harriet Warneford did;—who, Mary Tremenheere tells me, led a miserable life with her husband."

"Miss Tremenheere, Amy, is, I fear, a sad gossip!"

"How can she help answering me, mother, when I ask her questions?"

"Then never ask them, darling, about things which do not concern you."

Amy blushed at the reproof, and promised. It was perhaps in dread of a further lesson that she resumed the chapter of kindred.

"It always seems such a relief to Lady Harriet when her sister, Lady Louisa Eustace, arrives at Radensford Manor. They have so many old stories to talk about;—so many broken interests to revive!"

"They are, I believe, sincerely attached to each other," said Lady Meadowes, coldly:—and began to busy herself more actively in sorting the floss silks in her work-basket.

"And you, dearest mother—had you never any sisters?"

"None, Amy."

"And your father, you once told me, I remember, was a clergyman, and died when you were very young?"

"*Very* young."

"You lived then, till you married, alone with your mother?—And was she as good and tender a one as mine?"—

"My dearest Amy," said Lady Meadowes, with an effort which brought a hectic colour into her usually pale face, "there are some questions which it is so painful to answer, that they should never be asked. Be sure that, had I wished to talk to you about my family, I should have done so long ago."

"Forgive me, mother," cried Amy, starting up, so that the book she was carelessly holding, fell upon the floor, in her haste to seize and

kiss Lady Meadowes's delicate hand. "I will never speak to you about them again. But papa's: I *may* talk to you of *them*, without wounding your feelings; for you often explained to me, when I was a child, the family portraits in the China gallery—"

"The youngest among which, my dear child, dates from the reign of George the Second."

"Well, then, mother,—the miniatures in the breakfast parlour! Among *them*, there are Plymers and Cosways; my grandfather, in his velvet coat and gold frogs; and grandmamma, the last Lady Meadowes, in her fly-cap and powdered hair! But that young girl in the corner of the frame, in a beaver hat, with a riding-whip in her hand?"

"Your father's sister, Gertrude Meadowes."

"She died unmarried, then, I suppose. Was papa much attached to her?"

"Judge for yourself. You know his affectionate disposition."

"Yet he never mentions her. He was perhaps too much affected by her death?"

"She is not dead, Amy. She married Lord Davenport, and is still alive."

"Still alive? I have really and truly a right-down, living aunt?—How delightful!" cried Amy, as if she had chanced upon some wondrous hidden treasure.

"You are little likely to benefit by the possession. Your father and the Davenports have not met for many years. They are not upon speaking terms."

"On what account?"

"Had your father desired you to be acquainted with the circumstances, you would have heard them long ere this. Be satisfied, darling, that he, who is the best judge of his family affairs, would be hurt and seriously displeased if questioned concerning these relationships."

"And are *you*, too, angry with me, mamma?"

"Not in the least:—for you have erred inadvertently. Were you to renew the subject, I should be vexed, because it would be in direct opposition to my wishes."

Again, Amy fondly kissed her mother's hand; assuring her she had nothing to fear. But the restraint thus imposed upon her—restraint how new to Amy,—seemed to double the importance of the mystery. Relations whom she must never mention in her father's presence! Relations, so near, too, whom she was never to see or recognise! The interdiction was too tantalising. For some days after this perplexing conversation, she could think only of Lord and Lady Davenport.

On one point, she did not think it unlawful to gratify her curiosity. By referring to a Debrett's Peerage, some ten years old, which graced the library table, she found that "Henry, fourth Baron Davenport, residing at Ilford Castle, Westmoreland, and in New Street, Spring Gardens, had married the only daughter of Sir John Meadowes, Bart., of Meadowes Court, by whom he had two sons, Hugh and Marcus, some years older than herself; and a daughter, Olivia, one year younger."—Three cousins!—Here was a discovery!—Three cousins, tolerably of her own age!—

She dared not, however, again appeal to her mother for information. She had noticed that, on the evening of their last discussion, Lady Meadowes was unusually feverish and harassed; and for worlds would she not have risked annoying her, a second time. Amy was certain of obtaining information by applying to Mary Tremenheere, who fully justified Lady Meadowes's accusation that she was "a sad gossip;" nor would even Lady Harriet Warneford have refused to enlighten her on any subject concerning which she was entitled to be inquisitive. But she had no right to seek from others information refused by the kindest of mothers; and was even more cautious than usual when she found herself seated in the roomy chimney-corner of her father's old nurse, the wife of the parish sexton, Neighbour Savile (or Saveall, as he was called by the people of the village), an aged crone, who had outlived everything but her veneration for the Meadowes family, and her skill in curing the huge flitches of bacon which hung blackening in her vast chimney. Till now, Amy had been untiring in questioning

the old woman, concerning the births, deaths, and marriages of Meadowes Court; and the scrupulous care with which she had evaded all mention of a sister appertaining to her nursling — her own dear Sir Mark — sufficed to prove that she was cognizant of the family feud. Amy therefore restricted her inquiries to Neighbour Savile's rheumatics, and the old sexton's supply of tobacco:—having decided that, henceforward, the pedigree of the House of Meadowes must rest in peace!

The tongue, albeit an unruly member, is, however, easier of control than the imagination; and Amy's, whose newly-sprouting wings had little scope for exercise in the matter-of-fact routine of her quiet home, could not resist the temptation of hovering over the forbidden ground of Ilford Castle. Those three unknown cousins were objects of continual surmise. Olivia, she was certain, was a slender girl with flaxen ringlets—tender, playful, elegant. Her name denoted it. The only Olivia she had ever seen—a *protégée* of Lady Harriet Warne-

ford,—had beautiful flaxen ringlets and a voice like music: *ergo*, Olivia Davenport must be as fair as an ermine.

Such a one she did remember, whom to look at was to love.

Hugh, the elder son, was doubtless a stern, grave young man, qualified to be the representative of an ancient baronial race. Marcus—ah! Marcus was the favourite;—named, doubtless, after her father, and in all probability bearing the open countenance of Sir Mark, as well as possessing his loving heart and honourable nature.

Amy was fully prepared to rush into the arms of Olivia Davenport, and swear eternal friendship. But she was almost in hopes it would never be her fortune to meet her cousin Mark: so persuaded was she that the stars, which preside over the destinies of beauties in their eighteenth year, foredoomed them to fall desperately in love.

If Sir Mark or Lady Meadowes had been people to trouble their heads about their edition

of Debrett, they could not have failed to notice the strange facility with which it spontaneously opened at page 137 ;—being the second which treated of the births, marriages, and progeniture of English barons.

CHAPTER III.

THE spot where, next to Meadowes Court, the progress and prospects of Amy were watched with the fondest partiality, was the Rectory." Its venerable master loved her dearly :—first, because he possessed a kindly-affectioned nature; next, because her parents had been friendly neighbours to him for the last thirty years;—but more than all, because the child whom he had christened, the girl he had prepared for confirmation, was now a charming young woman, who made it one of her chief pleasures in life to lighten the cares of his daughter; whose life was saddened by solicitude for an only and ever-ailing child.

For this the grey-haired Rector felt as grateful to his young neighbour, as though she had been his superior in years and faculties. For Mrs. Burton, his tenderness was tinctured with a degree of morbid sensibility and self-reproach. Rachel had been the only daughter of his widowed fireside:—unusually lovely, unusually gifted;—and he had not only spoiled her, but by weak and narrow-sighted indulgence, marred her prospects in life. Educated in a showy London school, Rachel Henderson had formed connections more gay and brilliant than comported with her condition; and when eventually installed under the humble roof of Radensford Rectory, and her father saw her pining for brighter scenes, instead of endeavouring to instruct her in the happy art of home-keeping and home-adorning, he shrank from insisting on his claims to love and obedience. Ere the first stage of girlhood was overpast, when a pretendant to her hand presented himself, qualified, apparently, to place her in the gay worldly position she coveted, he accepted the proposals of Captain Burton, and even inconvenienced

himself to produce a suitable dowry to facilitate the marriage, solely in the hope to brighten the listless countenance which he could scarcely recognise as that of his darling and once-cheerful child.

But in this, the weak father sinned grievously against his better judgment. He neglected those searching inquiries by means of which every parent ought to be enabled to justify his sanction of a daughter's choice: and the results were disastrous. The smiles he had been so eager to restore to poor Rachel's countenance beamed only for a time. Haggard, careworn looks succeeded. The handsome and seemingly gallant and honourable young soldier proved to be a gambler and a sot; and sad as it was to see his daughter reduced to despair by his untimely death, after less than three years' wedlock, leaving her the maintenance of an infirm infant, Mr. Henderson returned thanks to Heaven for the death of his son-in-law. Feeling doubly bound to cherish and comfort the poor girl whom he had allowed to follow her own imprudent inclinations, he adopted

at once and for ever the widow and orphan.

Many years had now elapsed since on her return from India, where Captain Burton's death had taken place, Mrs. Burton re-established herself at Radensford Rectory. She was now eight-and-twenty, and her daughter nine years of age; and she could consequently contemplate the *début* of her little favourite, Amy Meadowes, with something of a maternal feeling.

"I can't help thinking with Mary Tremenheere, the Meadoweses a little to blame in keeping that dear girl so ignorant of the world and its ways," she observed to her father, while, walking home with him one evening at dusk, from Meadowes Court, they discussed together the increasing beauty and grace of Sir Mark's daughter.

"But why, my dear? Amy is never likely to see much of society. Lady Meadowes's health is far from strengthened. Sir Mark grows more and more attached to the old place. Nothing in the world, not even to see his

beloved girl admired and courted, would take him to London."

"I was not thinking of London."

"Sir Mark detests watering-places; and the idea of carrying his daughter to a marriage-market would revolt his fine old English spirit."

"And with reason. But as you say, Lady Meadowes's health is far from improved; and in the event of her death, Sir Mark might marry again for the sake of an heir to his property. On the other hand, if Sir Mark should die, his widow and daughter would be left in a sadly unprotected situation."

"You seem in a great hurry, my dear Rachel, to put an end to one or other of your friends," said Mr. Henderson, with a smile. "I, on the contrary, am inclined to assign a long life to both."

"May your good wishes prosper," rejoined his daughter. "Still, when I see poor Amy so satisfied that the best interests of this world lie comprised within a circle of five miles round Meadowes Court, I cannot help wishing that

Miss Honeywood had a little enlarged her horizon."

"Time enough—time enough. Worldly knowledge comes upon us of itself, with every day we live:—usually too soon, mostly too abundantly."

"Not too soon or too abundantly for those who are fated to an early struggle with the evils of life," added Mrs. Burton, in a low voice. Then, fearing that her father might interpret her observations into a reproach that she herself had been launched into the world in fatal ignorance of its arts and usages,—she added abruptly: "Amy's position is a peculiar one; and I really think her old enough to be forewarned of the slights she may hereafter have to undergo."

"Again I say, time enough. She may marry happily, and establish a position of her own."

"Marry?—At Meadowes Court?—Dearest father,—there is not a single man on this side the county!"

"They must come then from the other, and look after our Sleeping Beauty in the

Wood," persisted the kindly old man. "I see how it is, my dear Rachel. You are longing for the sight of orange-blossom and wedding favours. Meantime, let us do our best in assisting to amuse little Amy: that the pretty bird may not beat its wings against the cage which you have not patience to see so solitary."

Mrs. Burton made no answer. She had fallen into a fit of musing. *She* anxious for a sight of orange-blossoms, when her own bridal wreath had budded into such a crown of thorns! No, no! all she desired was that her young friend should be better prepared to wrestle with those cares and ills, with which during her brief married life she had found it so difficult to contend.

It was but a few days after this conversation that Miss Meadowes, who had driven over to the Rectory in her pony-chaise with a provision of grapes for little Sophia Burton, was sitting with Sophia's mother in her school-room,—a small library opening into the little square, formal, but highly cultivated Rectory garden,—projecting plans of winter charity for the poor

of Radensford, of whom Mr. Henderson and Sir Mark were the chief benefactors. As they talked together, or rather as Mrs. Burton reasoned and 'Amy silently acquiesced, the leaves of a sketch-book which lay on Mrs. Burton's desk when surprised by her pretty visitor, were slowly turned by the latter; sometimes with an admiring exclamation,—always with an air of interest.

The book contained a series of views and sketches of scenes in the Himalaya; wild, picturesque, and shaggy; many of them strikingly vigorous and original. These, by the signature S. B. affixed to them, Amy concluded to be the production of the late Captain Burton, whose Christian name was Sylvester; and carefully abstained from more than passing praise. Others, somewhat tamer in execution, bearing the name of Sharland, were evidently the water-colour drawings of a friend. At last, she came to a bold and admirable sketch in sepia,—at the foot of which was inscribed, "Hog-hunting at Fallonnah." And this clever group, the figures in which appeared to be portraits, was

subscribed in quaint Oriental-looking characters, evidently traced by the artist's brush rather than his pen,— "MARCUS."

"Marcus?" exclaimed Amy, whose fancy had been previously captivated by the masterly execution of the sketch. "Our family name! —How strange! —*What* Marcus, dear Mrs. Burton?—Tell me the surname of your Indian Salvator Rosa?"

Mrs. Burton, who from the first had appeared embarrassed and annoyed at seeing her album in the hands of Miss Meadowes, replied, almost coldly: "That book, dear Amy, is one of the few memorials left of my married life You have never seen it before, because I keep it carefully locked up. For me, it is replete with painful associations. I took it out this morning, only to ascertain a date which I thought I might find annexed to one of the drawings."

Amy instantly closed the book, and replaced it on the table.

"Forgive my indiscretion," said she. "You should have checked me at once. I fancied it was only an album, intended, like my own, for

general entertainment. Still," she continued, after a pause, during which Mrs. Burton was occupied in replacing the book in an outer case furnished with a Bramah's lock, "though I would not for worlds dwell upon a painful subject, do satisfy my curiosity as to whether your Marcus has anything to do with our family? It is such an uncommon name!"

"Not *very* uncommon," replied Mrs. Burton, in a hesitating manner, as if uncertain whether to impart the information required.

"This clever Marcus, then,—this man of genius, who puts us all to shame,—is *not*, as I hoped, a relation?"

"Pardon me. The drawings were done by your cousin, Captain Davenport."

"You know him then, dearest Mrs. Burton. You can tell me all about him!" said Amy, her face already in a glow of enthusiasm. "How delightful! What an unexpected pleasure!"

"My dear Amy," replied Mrs. Burton, evidently embarrassed, "if Lady Meadowes and your father have abstained from talking to you

about your cousins, depend on it they have good reasons for their silence. Ask yourself, my dear child, whether it would become me, distinguished as I have been by their kindness, to thwart their wishes, for the mere sake of indulging you with a little idle gossip!"

"Not idle gossip," persisted Amy. "My interest in these unknown relatives is an impulse of natural affection."

"An impulse of mere girlish curiosity," persisted Mrs. Burton, more gravely than was her wont. "Had you not accidentally discovered their existence, your natural affection would have remained dormant. Believe me, Amy,—believe one who has lived and suffered,—that information obtained by unfair means unfailingly recoils on those who have outraged the rule of right in obtaining it. The proverb tells us that 'Listeners hear no good of themselves.' People who open a letter not intended for their perusal, are sure to learn unwelcome tidings; and by pursuing your inquiries about Marcus Davenport, you might ascertain something calculated to give you pain:—certainly nothing to gratify the

natural affection you assign as the origin of your questions."

Amy sat rebuked and silent; too little in the habit of opposition to venture on further rejoinder. But she did not feel the less interested concerning her mysterious cousins, from having discovered in one of them so proficient an artist.

"Well, well! One gets to the bottom of all secrets and mysteries in time," said she, at length, rallying her spirits; "and the enigma rarely proves worth the time one has lost in puzzling over it. I find, dear Mrs. Burton, that papa has even initiated *you* into the greatest of all secrets—the history of our forthcoming improvements at Meadowes Court."

"Sir Mark acquainted me yesterday with the reason of Hurstley's frequent visits of late to Radensford. But I must pause a little, Amy, ere I give the name of improvement to the change. Meadowes Court is so perfect as a whole, that I cannot bear to think of the slightest change."

"Not when you hear that the physicians

declare the damp vapours of the moat to be most injurious to a person so delicate as poor mamma?"

"That point of view was never suggested. To *that* argument I bow. But how can it *be*, Amy? Though the old moat has existed for centuries, one never heard it talked of, or saw it written of, as unwholesome? I am afraid we are getting a little over-fastidious now-a-days about sanitary influences. We shall find at last that the whole habitable globe has scarcely a spot whose climate is perfectly salubrious."

"But what would you have my father do? After witnessing such protracted sufferings as poor mamma's, the moment a source of cure or even alleviation is suggested, he can only thankfully comply with the instructions of her medical attendants. Dr. Burnaby declares that half mamma's illness arises from the miasma generated by the moat; and my father has consequently resolved to do what has been done in half the ancient mansions in the county—that is, to dry it up; fill in the fosse, and surround the house with a pretty flower-garden,

instead of that horrible old nursery for toads and tadpoles."

Mrs. Burton smiled. In former days, before the Meadowes family dreamed of dispensing with this appendage to their ancient grange, she had always heard the moat described as a running stream, with a gravelly bottom, of which a few overgrown and superannuated carp were the sole inhabitants.

"And when are the works to commence?" she inquired.

"Next week. Papa signed the contract yesterday. It will cost little more than two hundred pounds; and by October, the new ground is to be ready for planting and sowing."

"But Lady Meadowes, so sensitive as she is, will never be able to remain in the house, while besieged by workmen?"

"Of course not. Forty or fifty men will be at work; and poor dear mamma would never stand the disturbance. Fortunately, Lady Harriet is going to visit the Eustaces, and has

offered us the use of the Manor House during her absence."

"Good news for *me*, Amy!" replied Mrs. Burton, kindly. "When only half a mile apart, we shall have no excuse for not meeting daily. And now, come in with me to luncheon, or poor Sophia will be wearying sadly for her dinner."

CHAPTER IV.

ENOUGH for the present of manor-houses and rectories,—buttercups and daisies:—

> My soul, turn from them; turn we to survey
> Where London's smoke obscures the orb of day;

more particularly in that narrow by-street in the parish of St. James—a hive of fashionable bachelors — where Marcus Davenport, the sketcher of Hog-hunting at Fallonnah, had, it can scarcely be said "set up his rest,"—but sheltered his unquietness.

There was nothing striking in the exterior of the house. The passage was chilled by the usual covering of half-obliterated oil-cloth, the stairs rendered dreary by the ordinary Persian-

patterned carpet worn at the protruding edges, common to London lodging-houses. But the moment you turned the handle of the back room on the second landing, which was Captain Davenport's peculiar domain, a different order of things prevailed. A cursory view of the room was like glancing over the first page of a clever new book. Your attention was riveted in a moment.

Not, indeed, by the splendour of the furniture; which consisted of a couple of incomparable lounging chairs, and divans covered with bright chintz, fitted into the recesses on either side the fireplace. But the pale green walls were hung with pictures by the same masterly hand which had supplied the sketches to Mrs. Burton's portfolio, and might have intitled a professional artist to the equivocal honours of the R.A.;—while a baized door leading to the adjoining bedroom was masked by a folding screen of tinted paper, adorned with *croquis* illustrating the works of Goethe, Hoffmann, and Jean Paul Richter, original, graphic, powerful; and though usually

attributed by a stranger to the varied talents of several artists of genius, the fruit of the same inspiration which had furnished the walls with their more elaborate specimens of art.

Like many old-fashioned London houses, the room, overlooking a sooty garden, in which grew nothing but broken crockery and sparrows, was enlarged by a bow-window; in the centre of which, sidling on its stand, was a tame pink cockatoo, whose parts of speech had been far more cultivated than those of many of its fashionable fellow-parishioners; while on the hearth-rug lay a grey Skye terrier, far gone in years, apparently on such terms of amity with the rival pet, as to have overcome in its favour the instinctive antagonism between fur and feathers.

Whenever a foreign *élégant*, or artist, visited the sanctum of Mark Davenport, he was sure to notice, amid such a prodigality of works of art, the absence of trophies of fanciful pipes and *armes de luxe*, which constitute the indispensable garnish of a foreign *appartement de garçon*. Of such things, Davenport, in his green and

salad days, had been as fond as his neighbours. But he had outgrown his taste for objects purporting to be picturesque, but serving only to collect the dust; in London, of so noxious a quality.

The adornments of his domicile were of a more suggestive order; a few clever statuettes on brackets, and one or two antiques collected on his travels. The only ornament on his table, besides a simple black marble inkstand and shabby old Russia-leather blotting book, much the worse for use, were a brasier for burning juniper berries, and a cracked old Flemish glass, containing a sickly sprig of rosemary.

But the atmosphere of the chamber was pleasant and well-regulated. In winter, a wood-fire blazed brightly; in summer, thick green blinds excluded the sun. Many a fine gentleman issuing from the lofty mansions of May Fair was heard to exclaim, on sinking into one of Davenport's easy chairs,—"By Jove! Mark, you take good care of yourself.—This is the most comfortable room in Europe."

What right, however, had he to be com-

fortable,—that Paria of a younger brother! Cheerless chambers in one of the Inns of Court would have better fitted his position than all this Sybarite indulgence. A difference in age of less than a year rendered him the subaltern of a brother intitled to be nursed in the lap of luxury, and rejoice in marrow and fatness. But the barrier was as insurmountable as though a century, in place of eleven months, intervened between the events which gave an heir to Ilford Castle, and a second olive-branch to its owner.

To the parents, the mother being still young, with the milk of human kindness yet unsoured by the storms of life, the two babes, rolling upon the lawn in their white tunics, possessed an equal charm. If either, the younger was preferred; as more loving, and more intelligent. The boys were commended, at five years old, to the care of the same nursery governess,—at eight, to the birch of the same tutor;—and at eleven, were despatched together to Eton,—where the precocity of Marcus placed him in the upper school, side by side with his brother. Both were "Mr. Daven-

port." There was nothing in the senior and junior attached to their patronymic sufficing to denote that one was predestined to feed upon the corn, wine, and oil of this world,—the other, upon its husks.

Hugh was reserved and gentle; Marcus wild and clever. But both were gentlemanly in mind and deportment; and as kindly disposed towards each other, as the struggle and uproar of a public school would allow them to exhibit. Each had his bosom-friend who was the natural enemy of the other, and created feuds between them. But during their holidays, at Ilford Castle, their tempers and pursuits were as uniform as if they were fated to live in Arcadia, nurtured on the honey of Hymettus.

Not till the year of Hugh's emancipation from Eton did it seem to occur to Lord Davenport that the future destinies of the two boys would be as dissimilar in quality as gold and lead. His lordship made the discovery, perhaps, because the outstanding schoolboy debts of the younger doubled those of the heir-apparent. Perhaps because, till within the last six months, the

fortune of his maiden sister, amounting to something above two thousand a-year, had been regarded in the family as the future inheritance of her godson, Mark. But Miss Davenport, always crotchety, had chosen, at forty-five, to replace her pet marmozets and Blenheim spaniels by a two-legged darling,—a sober widower, blest with a numerous brood, who speedily superseded her nephew in her unsettled affections and unsettled property. It was clear, therefore, that poor Marcus would have to provide for himself. Half his mother's fortune of twenty thousand pounds was all he had to depend upon; and that, only at her decease.

Lord Davenport, who from the period of his marriage had been gradually progressing, or shall we call it retrograding, from the poetry to the prose of life, was consequently forced to study the future interests of his progeny. Ten years before, he had been proudest of Hugh—fondest of Mark. Now, perhaps, he was fondest of Hugh, who in his nonage had given him least anxiety, and proudest of Mark; of whose abilities, even from the masters who

denounced him as a scapegrace, he received the highest commendation. But his lordship was fortunately of too practical a nature not to perceive the fruitlessness of talent combined with moral shortcoming; and was as little inclined to foresee in his family a William Shakspere, or even a Goldsmith or Sheridan, as if a shadowy view of the Fleet Prison loomed in the background. He accordingly favoured his younger born, previously to his departure for the University, with a didactic lecture as dry as sawdust; nearly as circumstantial as a Bridgewater Treatise, and not quite so edifying. Lord Davenport warned his son against Newmarket and tailors' bills, much as his own father, forty years before, had warned himself against infidelity and claret. Among his interdictions, however, there was less said about lounging and cigars than was altogether judicious:—just as a man in fear of the plague would scorn to flee away before the measles.

In spite, however, of the omission, Marcus, for several terms, did himself the utmost credit. Wonders were predicted of him. He was recog-

nised in the University, as the most brilliant ornament of the debating club, and booked for the highest honours. On the return of the two brothers to Ilford Castle for the long vacation, Hugh boasted of Mark to his parents and the friends of his parents, like some fond father, parading his only son. He even implored Lord Davenport to retain for his brother the seat in Parliament which was keeping warm for his less talented self. Nor were the Davenports, who had long perceived that this amiable eldest hope of theirs was as shy as a girl, altogether disinclined to listen to the suggestion.

But alas !

The third term, came a frost, a chilling frost.

The hare, lazy and self-confiding, had allowed itself to be overtaken by the tortoise. Partly because irritated by this unexpected check, and partly because, at twenty, Nature was working her way, Marcus Davenport now enlisted himself in a joyous band of University rebels, beyond all hope from secondary punishment; and in due time, Lord Davenport was respectfully apprised of the rustication of his second son.

The worldly-minded father was furious; thwarted in his projects—galled in his self-love. He had bragged too largely concerning the acquirements of the handsome scapegrace; and his lordship's vanity suffered still more keenly than his paternal affections. It was only by the prayers and entreaties of Hugh he was prevented from dealing so stern a measure of wrath upon the delinquent, as the pride of Marcus would scarcely ever have forgiven.

"Send me into the army, if you are so ashamed of me that you wish to lose sight of me," was the young man's undutiful rejoinder to even a modified explosion of his lordship's ire.

"To idle away your days in the Guards, and get deeper and deeper into debt?"

"The Guards?—for a poor dog with an allowance of two hundred a-year? No, no! The line—a condemned regiment—what you please. There are three under orders for India; where the jungle-fever, or a Mahratta war may perhaps rid the family of such an incumbrance."

Marcus spoke hardly and bitterly, in spite of the choking in his throat ; because Lord Davenport's unmitigated harshness had engendered evil feelings in return. When his mother addressed him, the same evening, in her dressing-room, mingling tears with her mild avowals of mortification and regret, he flung his arms round her neck, and sobbed like a child.

His father, meanwhile, profited by the hint thrown out. The seat keeping warm for Hugh, as well as his personal support of Government, secured attention to his claims at the Horse Guards. Within a month, the Honourable Marcus Davenport was gazetted to a regiment whose men were already embarking at Chatham. And before his mother had leisure to grow nervous, or his wild friends to suggest filial insubordination, his patent-leather equipage had been displayed at the door of a Bond Street outfitter, announcing his name and destination in letters as distinct and tall as the grenadier company of his new corps.

Few people found fault with the manner in which Lord Davenport disposed of his offspring.

No fighting was just then going on, in that unhappy land which by divine, or some other right, we assume the privilege of keeping quiet and healthy by copious phlebotomy of either the heart's-blood or the pocket's. Even if it had, hero-worship and the precedent of the Great Arthur's early soldiership rendered India a favourite field for incipient field-marshals,—and not a voice was upraised against his departure, saving that of his elder brother, to whom he was almost as a twin.

But this fraternal fondness was placed before Lord Davenport, by his friends, as an additional motive for Marcus's expatriation. So long as the bolder youth was at hand to keep him in the shade, poor Hugh, they said, would never overcome the diffidence which rendered him so silent and so cold.

"Homme propose, Dieu dispose." Before Mark Davenport had spent three months in the land of palanquins, his regiment was on active service in one of those periodical wars which, by an ample libation of British blood, propitiate the outraged genius of the soil.

In expiation of ancient thrones demolished, ancient dynasties extirpated, ancient treasuries pillaged, ancient institutions insulted, many a noble career has been cut short, many a noble heart laid in the dust, in some obscure skirmish in that land of the sun where we have planted the emblem of peace and good-will towards men, at the point of a scabbardless sword. Young Davenport, fortunate in a brave and able colonel, as well as in a commander-in-chief whose laurels are still verdant, was fortunate also in opportunities. In the course of the two following years, his rapid promotion was justified by honourable mention in more than one despatch. Twice had his mother the comfort of a burst of tears in the arms of her elder son, when, after a severe action, Hugh Davenport was able to point out to her the name they loved, not in the list of casualties, but among the officers recommended to the notice of the Horse Guards.

Still, the reasons which justified Lord Davenport for having launched his son in an arduous profession, had not ceased to exist. Not only

was the account of the young lieutenant at his agent's constantly overdrawn, but Marcus had found occasion to signify to the head of the family through his brother, the necessity under which he found himself of anticipating his annual allowance. For a time, the kind-hearted Hugh contrived, with the assistance of his father's banker, to prevent the bills drawn upon Lord Davenport from reaching his hands and provoking his displeasure. But his means were limited; and a second claim for five hundred pounds, brought down all the thunder of Jupiter Davenport on the heads of both his sons.

Searching inquiries brought to light that the budding hero on whom the lord of Ilford Castle was beginning to waste a thousand chimeric hopes, was an extravagant profligate. Captain Burton, the wildest of his brother officers, had, it appeared, initiated him into the fatal mysteries of play: and when, at length, at the close of the war which was the means of securing for him the company left vacant by the death of that dangerous friend, Lord Davenport obtained from the commander-in-chief leave of absence

for his son, it was rather with the view of breaking off the fatal connections he had formed in India, than of indulging the earnest desire of his wife and elder-born, to embrace the prodigal from whom they had now been six years estranged.

On his return to England, bronzed with travel, matured by time, manly in habits and gentlemanly as ever in deportment, even Lord Davenport, though deeply incensed against him by exaggerated reports of his excesses, could scarcely believe that a young man so pleasing in his exterior, and so accomplished in mind, could be the dare-devil represented by his superior officers.

His arrival was the signal for home-happiness and family festivity, now becoming rare at Ilford Castle. Lord Davenport, mortified alike by the degeneracy of his younger son and the insignificance of the elder, had long consoled himself by seeking excitement in pursuits characteristic of his mercenary nature. A theoretical agriculturist, the improvement of his estates occupied his whole time, and absorbed all his money;

till, at last, every hour and guinea seemed wasted that was not devoted to the interests of his landed property.

At no time of his life a pleasant companion, his lordship was becoming so completely a clod of the valley, that Hugh Davenport would have seen as little of home as though he too were fighting in the Punjaub, but for the sake of the gentler and kinder parent so much in need of his society. Not that his mother had ever appealed to his sympathy. No amount of suffering would have wrung out of her heart one disrespectful word concerning the husband she had sworn to honour and obey.

Country neighbours and occasional guests at Ilford Castle were heard, indeed, to whisper that Lady Davenport was nearly as cold and silent as her husband; and scarcely a visitor ever issued from the gates, but felt relieved from disagreeable constraint. For such casual observers were not likely to ascribe the frequent changes of colour of that mild pale face to repressed sensibility; and few surmised that the woman, whose rank and fortune appeared so enviable,

had been through life a martyr to Duty. When scarcely past the age of girlhood, and as yet unintroduced into society, Gertrude Meadowes had accepted, in obedience to parental authority, the hand of a man twenty years older than herself, whose object in the alliance was to secure a domestic slave and an heir to his estate; and though both expectations were realised, he was not of a sufficiently generous nature to grant a single concession in return.

Her brother — her only brother — having shortly after her own marriage taken to himself a wife in direct opposition to the will of his surviving mother and the opinion of his august brother-in-law, Lord Davenport had intimated to Sir Mark Meadowes that, neither he nor Lady Meadowes would ever be received at Ilford Castle, or allowed the smallest intercourse with his sister or her children; a threat to which he had adhered with a degree of vindictive obstinacy, such as the inconsistency of modern society rarely calls into play.

It is true that circumstances favoured their estrangement. They were never accidentally

thrown in each other's way. The Meadoweses lived in the strictest retirement; and but for the yearnings of Lady Davenport's tender heart after her only brother and his offspring, they might easily have been forgotten at Ilford Castle.

This unnatural estrangement, however, threw a cloud over her existence, even before the conduct of her younger boy afforded her cause for dissatisfaction. Yet dearly as she loved her brother Mark, when forbidden to correspond with him, she obeyed. Her whole life had been an act of obedience:—an act more praiseworthy than pleasant. But the darker moments of the domestic struggle were yet to be encountered.

CHAPTER V.

One half the twelvemonth's leave of absence accorded to Captain Davenport at the end of the campaign, on the usual plausible plea of ill-health, had just expired; when his brother Hugh walked one morning into the bachelor domicile already described:—it would be incorrect to say, to breakfast—for, as regarded hours, and more especially meal-hours, Marcus was as little to be relied upon as if still a campaigner. But Mr. Davenport was fortunate in finding him seated before his steaming coffee and smoking pillau; and their colloquy was all the more sociable for the cover instantly laid for the

unexpected guest by Captain Davenport's incomparable soldier servant.

Astonishing how much the exercise of the masticatory functions tends to forward despatch of small-talk! Hugh, who was fresh from Ilford Castle, where he had been spending the recess, announced that Marcus had grievously offended his father by keeping aloof from the family circle.

"I can't help it! His lordship must fume away his wrath," said Captain Davenport, in reply to his brother's mild remonstrances. "It would have been gross hypocrisy on my part to go. I am bored out of all human patience at Ilford. 'Tis the only spot under the canopy of heaven where I am not allowed the free exercise of my understanding. At my last visit, I found myself gradually lignifying into just such an automaton as my poor dear mother! It is horrible—yes, by Heavens, Hugh, it is really horrible to see the weight of authority by which the governor has extinguished her powers of mind."

"I see nothing horrible in the case," said

Hugh, quietly helping himself to more rice. "My mother is an excellent wife; and perfectly understands the best duties of woman's mission.

She has her humour best when she obeys."

"Why I vow to Heaven, my dear Hugh, the Ilford torpor is extending even to yourself!" cried Marcus. "My father, with his soul concentered in his draining-tiles and patent manures, is gradually obliterating the intellects of the family.—Accept my sincere congratulations, Mark Davenport, my friend, for your obstinacy in spending the holidays in town; thanks to which, I am not at present conscious of any symptoms of the family infirmity."

"What infirmity?" inquired the matter-of-fact Hugh.

"Something akin to the condition of the half-alive prince in the Arabian Tales, one moiety of whose person had been converted into marble by an evil genius."

Hugh replied by a modified smile. "Be assured, my dear fellow," said he, "that at present, I enjoy the full use of my limbs."

"Ay, but not of your faculties. At Ilford, you dare not say your soul's your own. At least, I can answer for myself that, with my father's eye upon me, I never feel the lawful proprietor of either soul or body. I could not, for instance, presume to call for a glass of pale ale with my chicken, as I am doing now because I breakfast at tiffin time. His lordship would be shocked—no, not shocked, but indignant at any innovation foreign to his habits:—to say nothing of having no pale ale in his cellar to take the shine out of his homebrewed, as heavy as his own speeches at the Agricultural meeting."

Again, Hugh smiled faintly.

"I wish, my dear Mark," said he, "that there were no graver causes of dissension between you and my father, than the quality of his ale, or of his oratory."

"When people want to quarrel," rejoined his brother, "they quarrel about straws. And there is always a truss at hand to supply disputes between myself and my Anchises. On no subject do we think alike! He told me, the last time there was a flare-up between us, that

I was no Davenport—that I was a Meadowes at heart. I believe he said it chiefly to wound my poor mother's feelings. But, thank Heaven, she only looked the more fondly at me, and seemed gratified by the accusation."

"But what had provoked him to such a remark?"

"Aha, Mr. Hugh! Jesuit that you are! trying to make me prove myself in the wrong. What provoked him to it was that, after he had summed up, for the ten thousandth time, every guinea I had cost him since I went to Eton—all the debts—all the bills he had paid on my unworthy behalf, I, knowing my liabilities, and the utter impossibility of ever meeting them without selling my commission, gave him a remote hint of my intention to quit the army."

"Against which, of course, he remonstrated?"

"Why *of course?* Am I not at liberty, at six-and-twenty, to choose my own profession?"

"At *liberty*, certainly—"

"At nineteen, I went to India to please him; squandering the best years of my life among cobra de capellas and the tigers of the Bengal

jungles and a line regiment," continued Marcus with growing warmth. "And having struggled through it all to the best of my limbs and abilities, for my own credit and that of my family, I am not going to be browbeaten by the narrow-minded author of my days because I want to pay my debts, like an honest man, by the only means in my power."

"But surely, as my father gave you your commission, he has some right to a voice in the matter?"

"Gave me my commission? Could he do less than bestow a few hundred pounds on the maintenance of one out of his two sons? Why send me to Eton—why send me to the University—if he intended to place me in a marching regiment and allow me only half the interest of the ten thousand pounds which he calls my portion under his marriage settlements—*My portion!*" repeated Marcus, impatiently shrugging his shoulders. "With such views, he had better have sent me to the Ilford Grammar-school and articled me to an attorney."

"Marcus, Marcus!"

"Well—because I argued the case with him on its own merits, and when he twitted me with wasting in riot and excess what he was pleased to term the splendid abilities with which Nature has gifted me, and I respectfully replied that so far from wasting them, I had every encouragement given me by my friends to obtain a handsome competence as an artist, he exploded into a fit of frenzy, and called me a Meadowes at heart."

"On which, alas! you parted in mutual displeasure, and have not met since!"

"And you wonder at it?"

"My father might have called *me* a Meadowes fifty times over, and I should have felt only proud of the name once borne by my mother, one of the most ancient in England."

"The tone—the manner in which he made the accusation were everything. My father used the name only to signify one of a race who don't mind disgracing themselves to gratify their foolish fancies."

"But after your threatening him to become an artist—a *professional* artist—"

"In the name of Heaven, why *not?* You all pretend to be proud of these Indian sketches of mine. If I can command a handsome income by the practice of an art which immortalises, what is there more degrading in the occupation than in that of the law, for which I was first destined? In either case, I sell to the public the works of my brains and hands. A colour-box, or a pounce-box—what difference? Receiving the price of a picture is surely not more vile than cringing for fees to an attorney?"

"In such cases, usage is everything."

"Usage *has been* everything. But the world, my dear Hugh, is coming to years of discretion. Our grandsons will find their account in becoming painters, sculptors, authors, civil engineers; instead of wasting their youth soldiering in country towns or noxious colonies, or learning profane oaths and foul language in a cockpit; in order to achieve a moderate provision as generals or admirals, when they have no longer a tooth left to eat the bread they have earned so hardly."

"The wisest of us, I'm afraid, can little surmise what will be done by his grandsons," observed Hugh Davenport, gravely. "Precedent is, I admit, neutralised by the present ab-normal state of the world; but—"

"There!" interrupted Marcus, triumphantly. "Even *you* admit that society is in a state of transition. Then why not profit by the movement? Depend upon it, Hugh, if I set up as artist, I will contrive to make my palette and brush respected."

"Ay, if you only bully the rest of the world as you have bullied my father, and are endeavouring to bully *me*," replied his brother, laughing.

"Then let us talk reasonably," said Marcus, lowering his voice, which had been gradually wound up to barrack-room pitch, till it provoked his pet cockatoo into sympathetic screams of "Marcus, old fellow, Marcus, Marcus!"

"With all my heart. I came hither on purpose."

"As an emissary from my father?"

"As a brother who loves you better than all

your friends and toadies put together," replied Hugh, warmly. "Marcus, you are not just."

"Yes, I am, for I am ashamed of myself," cried the younger brother, extending his hand. "Wait a moment till I am cool again, and we will start fair."

And having rung for the table to be cleared, and dipped his hands in a finger-glass, Captain Davenport wheeled round his arm-chair towards the divan by the fireside, on which Hugh had already taken up his position.

"In one word then, Marcus," resumed his brother, "my mission here is to persuade you to accept a third of the allowance of six hundred a-year made me by my father; which, with the two hundred he gives you, will bring our incomes to a level—four hundred a-piece."

"For what do you take me, Hugh?"—cried Marcus, drawing up to his highest altitude.

"For a kind brother, if you accede to my proposal. Believe me, you will do nothing with my father. He has taken as regards you what the French call a *mauvais pli;* and so long as you and he are at odds, there is no peace at Ilford."

"And you consider *that* a sufficient reason for me to rob you of your birthright?"

"With four hundred a-year, I shall have enough, and more than enough, for my needs. Were my father to allow me the thousand or fifteen hundred per annum which you and your friends sometimes say it is his duty to do, I should not know what to do with it. I might become a prodigal, or a miser."

"Neither the one nor the other.—You would remain what you are:—an excellent fellow—considering everybody's comfort before your own."

"You give me more credit than I deserve. I have no expensive tastes. A better steed than is comprised in my old bay hack, would be a nuisance to me. Half the year I live at free quarters in the old den in Spring Gardens; the other half, at Ilford Castle."

"Hugh! you will drive me mad!" interrupted Captain Davenport, starting up in disgust. "Do you mean to stereotype your life and memoirs in this creeping style? Do you intend to degenerate altogether into 'the

weed that rots itself at ease in Lethe's wharf?' Am I never to be as proud of the development of your mind as of the warmth of your heart? You know, as well as I do, all you might be; all we have a right to expect of you. Yet under the leaden mace of my father's authority, I swear you are becoming a mere acquiescent puppet. You sit in the House as like a log, as you used in the old school-room at Ilford. You consider only your duty towards Lord Davenport, by whom you were returned;—not your duty towards your neighbour, whose interests you have sworn on the Gospel to serve and protect!"

"You are somewhat hard upon me, Mark," said Hugh Davenport, taking advantage of his brother's pause for breath.

"Not harder than you deserve! Moreover, as you have just done a princely thing by me—I speak under the safeguard of that great obligation.—I would give worlds—such worlds as one has to give—that you would begin to do yourself justice, and prove yourself to the world all you have shown yourself to *me*. But that

miserable shyness of yours, dear Hugh, and above all, your dread of irritating my father and causing him to harass his wife, will wrap round your youth in worthless obscurity till, when hereditary rank and fortune devolve upon you, you will have become old, cold, selfish and idle; disposed to follow implicitly the track of preceding Davenports,—the line of cart-wheels and heavy wagons! Consider to what a calculating machine my father has reduced himself; as plodding a money-maker in his agricultural speculations as any old grocer in Cheapside; and for the love of mercy and of me, beware of going and doing likewise."

"Scarcely likely, with such a Hotspur for a councillor," pleaded Hugh, with one of his forgiving smiles. "Meanwhile, be patient, and allow me to fulfil my duties, public and private, as I understand them:—cheering the life of the dearest of mothers; and tottering in my political leading-strings, till I have learned to walk."

"When even your old nurse could tell you that leading-strings have been abolished for the last half century; and that brats and tyros

acquire the use of nature's gifts, by means of their own thumps, bumps, and tumbles. You have been more than five years in Parliament, Hugh. Who besides Dod and the almanack is even cognizant of the fact?"

"Thousands of the townspeople of Rawburne, whose interests I have been the means of protecting; scores, whose interests I have been the means of advancing."

"Hillo! Jobbery and corruption, Parson Hugh?—I never should have thought it."

"No jobbery; but a fair exercise of lawful influence in favour of worthy objects. As a speaker, I am not wanted. My father knew, when he placed me in Parliament, my intentions on that head; as well as the exact character and bent of my political opinions. I have not deviated from them. *He* is satisfied—Rawburne is satisfied—*I* am satisfied. Why seek to disturb our mutual satisfaction?"

"Because I can't bear to see a priceless diamond serving only as a lantern to light the poor fisherman's cottage—as we used to read in the Arabian Nights, before they were spoiled

by being made specimens of what Byron calls 'the choicest Orientalism.'"

"Every dunce in the House, my dear Mark, is a priceless diamond in the estimation of his nearest relations; and believe me—"

But Marcus had no leisure just then for the exercise of his faith or credulity. The room-door was burst open by what at first sight appeared to be a gentleman disguised as a Turk in a masquerade costume, who had grossly over-dressed his part. A vest and tunic of an extravagant shawl-pattern, were cinctured at the waist with a scarlet cord and tassels, over long, loose red trowsers, and yellow morocco slippers, crowned by a richly-embroidered fez; from which escaped long auburn locks, intermingled with most Saracenic whiskers meeting below the chin of the wearer.

Holding a cherry-stick pipe in one hand, and the Times newspaper in the other, this unceremonious visitor threw himself on one of the divans near the fireplace; and, having tossed out of his eyes the dishevelled locks blown into them by the rapidity of his ascent in mounting

the stairs, he nodded familiarly to Hugh Davenport, and saluted the younger brother by the name of "old fellow;" a mode of address whose comprehensive tenderness is equivalent to the "*mon cher*" of a French *élégant*.

Hamilton Drewe, the intruder who, from his domicile on the first floor, had thus unceremoniously invaded his neighbour's territories, would, however, have scorned the name of "*élégant*." Though so extravagantly accoutred, he flattered himself he had a soul above buttons—even though they were of cinquecento fashion or wrought by Froment Meurice. Rich in personal gifts, and tolerably clever, this young gentleman might have formed a valuable member of society, had he not emerged into the London crowd at a moment when the white-cravated Brummel school which succeeded to the white-coated Sir John Lade school, had just abdicated in favour of the eccentric man of genius, copied after the pattern of Vivian Grey.

Most people are of opinion that the Honourable and Right Honourable aspirants to the bays,

who, in these our times, indite maudlin histories, flaccid romances, or helter-skelter books of travels, —or who favour Mechanics' Institutes and Provincial Athenæums with a view of their white gloves, embroidered shirts, and fiddle-faddle philosophy, exhibit a considerable improvement on the coarse men of coaching times, or the fine gentlemen of the Regency. Since they drink less, they are supposed to think more. But as regards the general benefit of mankind, there was more manliness in the rougher class which was less afraid of meeting the winds of Heaven face to face. The dandies fought well at Waterloo,—established the sportsmanship of Melton, —and have budded the old crab-stock of John Bull with fruit of excellent flavour. It remains to be seen whether the self-seeking, over-conscious, over-taught, and over-teaching generation we have baptized in the waters of Helicon, and nurtured upon the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, will not abort into peevish old prigs, incapable of expanding into the lofty sentiments and generous affections of middle age;—maundering away their days at Scientific Meetings and

Literary Associations, where they are courted, for the value of their "name in the bills," into a belief that they understand what is going on; instead of devoting their time to the multifarious duties apportioned to their station in life.

Hamilton Drewe was one of the best specimens of the class: for he was thoroughly in earnest. Early an orphan, and born to the enjoyment of an estate of nearly five thousand a-year in the sturdy county of Northumberland, his guardianship had been unluckily consigned to the hands of a distant relative, an old bachelor, wedded by a morganatic marriage to the whole Nine Muses at once; who looked upon literary renown as the highest attainable distinction. Instead of bringing up his ward to be a useful man in his generation, qualified to reconcentrate a property injured by neglect and a long minority, Wroughton Drewe, Esq., F.R.S., F.A.S., F.L.S. and all the rest of it — had taught him to despise provincial life; to denounce country gentlemen as clods of the valley; and to prefer public scholarship and an assumed sympathy in the opening of barrows

and collecting of scarabæi, to the legislation of his county, or his country, and the "better regulation" of himself and his estates.

Instead of sending his young relative to one of our public schools, Mr. Drewe fancied he was doing better for his intellects and morals, by placing him under the care of a forty-donkey-power pedagogue of a private tutor. At sixteen, he was removed from the narrow village circle to which he had been an object of adulation, to a German university, to be rendered muzzy with Hegelian philosophy, beer, tobacco, and æsthetics: nor was it wonderful that, at twenty, he should return to the hands of his cousin Wroughton, with a smattering of universal knowledge, and in his portmanteau a thin quarto of fugitive poetry, original, and translated.

Now Drewe the elder was a man of Bloomsbury;—in his youth a working placeman, but long since retired on a pension and a moderate competence; to find recreation in remodelling his education by the lectures of the Royal Institution, and the sittings of the Horticultural, Linnæan, Zoological, Philological, Ethnological

Medico-botanical, Entomological, and Heaven knows how many more learned societies; where he fancied himself as much instructed, as men really instructed find themselves amused. At all events, he acquired the cant of scientific knowledge; as the connoisseurs of the last century, so ably described by Goldsmith and Sterne, acquired the jargon of criticism. A few dinners, in the course of the season, to the sapient professors rejoicing in the appendix to their names of all the letters of the alphabet conjoined with that of F, obtained for him a reputation of Mecænas-ship. And though he would have been puzzled to classify the groundsel springing within the rusty palisades of Bloomsbury Square, or the aphides sulkily fattening thereon, he passed, from Museum Street to the London University, as an embodied Cosmos. Rusty-coated literati inclined their heads reverentially when they heard mention of the name of Mr. Wroughton Drewe.

By way of introducing his rich and accomplished admirable Crichton of a ward to the *beau monde*, he put up his name at the Alfred, and

one or two equally somniferous clubs, and proposed him as a member of several learned societies; and great was his mortification when, some months afterwards, the erratic genius suddenly started for the East, in a fit of disgust at the severe castigation inflicted by the critics upon his maiden volume. The ex-guardian consoled himself, as best he might, by the conviction that he would return from the Cataracts of Upper Egypt, à la Byron, exalted in importance by an Oriental beard, and a forthcoming canto of a new Childe Harold.

Nothing of the kind. The young gentleman brought only a few shawls, tobacco pouches, and papooshes; with his dragoman's and courier's accounts, to be audited, and a constitution considerably enfeebled by the debilitating fever of the Levant.

He had, however, established in the interim a species of reputation. He had been called in literary journals "that enterprising traveller, Mr. Hamilton Drewe"—nay, in a journal seldom read except by the victims of its sanguinary articles, that "promising scholar," that "dis-

tinguished and rising poet ;" and he became consequently still more enamoured of himself than when simply patted on the back by Bloomsbury Square.

The promising scholar and distinguished poet considered it due to his reputation to give literary breakfasts, and literary dinners ; sedulously frequented by certain pseudo scholars and self-styled men of letters ; who fooled him to the top of his bent—called him Byron—Lamartine — Eothen—drank his claret, drew on his banker, and when his back was turned, laughed him to scorn. In Hunt and Roskell's bill, there appeared to his debit an item of six silver-gilt standishes. — Six !—Could the ink consumed in inditing " Blossoms of the Soul," have demanded the use of six standishes ? No ! but the small reviewers did—who had wrapped up that delicate and well-puffed effusion in the cotton of their bespoken praise.

The youthful bard, or as the Knights of the Standish styled him, the youthful darling of the Muses, had not thought it necessary to re-explore, on his return to Christendom, the

"wilds of Bloomsbury." Having despatched to his ex-guardian his tributary offering of papyrus, and a MS. or two purchased for its weight in gold, at one or other of the Levantine monasteries which Mr. Curzon's interesting work had brought into notice, he issued strict orders to the Giannino whom Byron's example had erected into his Groom of the Chambers, never to admit into them a bald-headed, hook-nosed elderly gentleman, bearing his own name and the physiognomy of a vulture digesting.

In exchange for what he renounced in this erudite privy councillor, the incipient Byron devoted to the pursuit of literary distinction under difficulties, had acquired only the friendship of Marcus Davenport. And to a man like Drewe, it was invaluable. Marcus was an unsparing hater of humbug;—a sworn enemy to impostors. He would not have toadied a king for his throne: far less a reviewer for his praise. Least of all, any of the six bestandished editors, unheard of in the world of letters save by hapless authors of volumes of Occasional Poems.

Dr. Johnson could not have spoken with more brutal plainness than Davenport to his aspiring neighbour of the first floor,—

That best natur'd man with the worst natur'd Muse,—

when advising him to abjure foolscap and wirewove, and go home and cultivate his estates.

"At Cub Hall," said he, "you may become a useful man in your generation; marry a baronet's daughter, and improve the race of swedes, sheep, and Drewes. As a poet, take my word for it, you'll never rise to the level of Day and Martin's, or the author of Human Life. Far better crown yourself with a wreath of turnip-tops, my dear fellow, than with such miserable laurels."

CHAPTER VI.

But it is almost time to return into Gloucestershire; where incidents of unusual interest were disturbing the even tenour of the ways of Meadowes Court.

In Amy Meadowes's monotonous life it was an event to migrate from home even to the distance of a couple of miles. Sir Mark was to remain on the spot, as overseer of the works. But the transfer of the invalid to her new domicile was not effected without some anxiety both to her husband and child.

To their great surprise, Lady Harriet was standing under the porch of Radensford Manor to receive her guests.

"Yes! It is even so," said she, offering her arm to assist Lady Meadowes into the drawing-room, where a cozy sofa drawn near the fire, awaited her. "After all my fine professions of making you lady-paramount here, dear Lady Meadowes, I must claim your hospitality. I am prevented going to my sister Louisa by illness in her house. So far from receiving me, she has sent me her son William, to be out of the way of the fever which is raging around them. Had she wished me, however, to keep the engagement, I should not have thought of taking the poor boys into the danger of infection."

"But under all these circumstances, we shall perhaps be in your way?" said her visitor. "The carriage is not yet unpacked. Nothing would be easier than to return, and postpone our undertaking for a time."

"Nothing would be more difficult, if you intend to complete it before the frosty weather sets in. And why, my dear friend? Surely you know enough of this rambling old house to admit that it contains three or four spare bed-

rooms;—and that nothing could delight me half so much as to have them occupied by you and yours."

"Then we are all happy, and the thing is settled," interrupted Amy. "Our visit to Radensford will be far pleasanter than we had a right to expect."

Then, recollecting that Lady Harriet's nephew, William Eustace, who had occasionally visited the Manor House as long as she could remember, was now a young man of four-and-twenty, a Member of Parliament, and a star in the fashionable world, it suddenly occurred to her that she had said too much; and, blushing and confused, she made matters worse by endeavouring to modify her frank declaration.

She could have withdrawn her compliment in all sincerity on the morrow. After an evening spent in disjointed chat in Lady Harriet's old-fashioned drawing-room, Amy felt that the Mr. Eustace, who was no longer called William in the family, was anything but an acquisition. He was either dull, or supercilious. She wasted some time in endeavouring to find out *which.*

For though silent and unsympathetic, he was too good-looking and too well-bred to be an object of indifference. The result of her cogitations was, that it was a pity so handsome a young man should be so thoroughly disagreeable. But Amy's cheerful temper was not long influenced by the dryness of their unexpected inmate. She proceeded to amuse the little boys when they were released from the school-room, and to arrange Lady Meadowes's work-table and sofa, exactly as if he had not been present.

To do him justice, he intruded as little as possible into the family circle. Off at early morning with the keepers to shoot over the wide-lying farms of the Manor, he was never visible till dinner; to the hilarity of which, he contributed about as much as the statue of the commandant would have done to the supper of Don Juan. Even at the tea-table, with the honours of which Amy was entrusted, while her mother and Lady Harriet crooned together over their household interests and parish gossip, instead of making the smallest effort to entertain the fair young

guest of the house, he retreated to a distant sofa with a reading lamp and a pamphlet.

Marvellous, indeed, would it have appeared to Amy, had any one informed her that this silent young gentleman passed for a Phœnix in his own county; and was classed, even in London, among the "men of wit and pleasure about town." His abilities, unquestionably above par, had been polished by what Great Britain calls a first-rate education, viz., a public school and the university;—on learning which, Amy was disposed to attribute his dulness to an overweight of classics and mathematics.

She judged him wrongfully. Young Eustace was no pedant. His present moroseness arose from a certain lecture by which his aunt had signified, on his arrival, that she considered his heart in considerable danger from the attractions of a simple country girl;—*his* heart—for which Clarissa Harlowe, in all the glory of her beauty and heiress-ship, would have had as little attraction as her dairy-maid! Even in the midst of her flurries and fusses at the compulsory change of her plans, Lady Harriet had found time to

exact from her nephew that he would not endeavour to turn the head of the rustic beauty under her roof by unmeaning attentions; which after all would possibly end in his own entanglement.

"Fear nothing, my dear aunt," was his scornful reply. "I promise you that your partridges and pheasants are the only victims likely to signalise my sojourn at Radensford."

"That's well, — that's right, — that's all I wanted to hear," said she, accepting at once his self-confident assertion. "For I am too well acquainted with my sister Louisa's principles, to hope for forgiveness if I allowed you to form an attachment to Amy Meadowes."

"To the daughter of an old baronet? Why what am I myself but a baronet's son?"

"No matter. Louisa and I understand each other. I know her views for you; and shall certainly do nothing to thwart them.

Mr. Eustace was too proud to pursue the inquiry. Neither his mother nor his aunt were people to be forced into frankness. Creations of the point-ruffles and hoop-petticoat school

of education, in which filial duty was synonymous with passive obedience, having practised it towards their own parents, they now exacted it of their offspring. Both were well-intending, conscientious women; but unyielding as iron in the execution of the duties into which they had been trammelled. Born of an exemplary family and reared in a circle above and beyond the reach of vulgar temptations, they had no charity for the frailties of their less fortunate fellow-creatures. Like the potter's clay, they had hardened in the sunshine of life: had suffered no persecution—had learned no mercy. They expected the business of the stirring struggling world to be transacted with the praiseworthy punctuality of their own narrow households; and the smallest default in morality was visited with anathema and excommunication; not only as regarded the tables of divine law, but in all those petty enactments of conventional life summed up by common-place people into "public opinion."

Lady Harriet, indeed, was a trifle less severe than her sister; for the deaths of a beloved

son and daughter-in-law in the prime of life had in some degree mollified the sternness of her heart. Till those melancholy events, though compelled by her late husband, Colonel Warneford, to maintain terms of civility with their neighbours at Meadowes Court, she had treated Lady Meadowes with the coldest reserve. But from the period of her great loss, when the kindly sympathy and Christian condolence of the gentle invalid were so unsparingly yielded, she had renounced in Lady Meadowes's favour her favourite phrase of "remembering what was due to herself and to public opinion."

But though thus humanely oblivious, — though she condescended to admit to her friendship a faultless, blameless woman,—she understood too well the prejudices of Sir Henry and Lady Louisa Eustace to suppose they would tolerate a marriage between their only son and the daughter of a promoted governess. If even Lord and Lady Davenport had judged it due to their dignity to break off all connection with Sir Mark Meadowes in consequence of his marriage, it was not likely that people who so

punctiliously submitted to the law of public opinion as the Eustaces, should be more lenient.

As might be expected, Lady Harriet's officiousness and superfluous prohibitions secured the usual results. Amy, who would have been mystified and probably disgusted by Mr. Eustace's habitual style of London trifling and flirtation, was piqued by his incivility. While on the other hand, the self-sufficient Club-lounger, who would have resented the *corvée* of making the agreeable to a country Miss, began to fancy that the fruit must be indeed golden, when so dragonised by his dictatorial aunt. He was startled to find his apparent incivility fail to humiliate as it ought the untutored country girl; nor could he help continually speculating upon the influence of his conduct on her countenance and manner. He was always watching her. Even when beating a covert at three miles' distance from the Manor House, he found himself wondering what Amy was doing by the fireside; and how she managed to get through the morning amidst skeins of silk and balls of worsted, enlivened

only by such wearisome companionship as that of his perpendicular kinswoman.

One day, it suddenly crossed his mind that some trick or artifice was concealed under the sage counsels of Lady Harriet. Conscious how deeply he was touched by the singular loveliness and *naïveté* of Amy Meadowes, it occurred to him that this might be the end Lady Harriet had intended to accomplish. The visit of the Meadoweses to Radensford might have been pre-arranged. He, *he*, the sapient and fashionable William Eustace, Esq., M.P., was perhaps the dupe of a confederation of rustics,—a fox caught in a mole trap!

When this surmise presented itself first to his mind, in the course of one of his snipe-shooting excursions in the forest of Burdans, he happened to be almost within view of poor Amy's venerable birthplace; and, as if pricked by a spur, he suddenly started off in the direction of Meadowes Court. In his whelphood, he had been a first favourite with the sonless old baronet. He would go and ask him for some breakfast, and ascertain whether there

were really works and workmen in the case, to account for the dispersion of the family.

Long before he reached the grey walls of the ancient *Stamm-Haus*, the question was answered. The road was cut up, and unsightly with ruts. Muddy planks were lying about;—a fishy, fœtid odour pervaded the atmosphere. Dirty-looking labourers were driving barrows, or wielding shovels; and in coasting the mansion in order to reach the entrance-bridge, Mr. Eustace obtained an enlivening glimpse of a muddy fosse, whose filthy surface partially clothed with coarse herbage, decayed weeds, gaping blue cockle-shells and broken crockery, was quite as vexatious to the eye as its emanations were unsatisfactory to the smell.

The young sportsman began to feel that he might as well have pursued his sport in the forest. It was however too late to think of retreat. Sir Mark who, in his old green cutaway and well-worn flat straw hat, was inspecting the unloading of the earth-carts, a few of which had discharged their burden at the further extremity

of the moat, was already hurrying forward to meet his visitor, shading his eyes from the morning sun to assist his scrutiny. Eustace was forced to advance; with far less alacrity however, than the pointers, who seemed to perceive that they had reached a land of plenty—whether as regarded its kennel or its coverts.

"Why 'tis,—yet no, it can't be,—little Willy Eustace—that is, young Mr. Eustace!" cried the frank old baronet, seizing the hand which his visitor shyly extended towards him. "Well, God bless me, this *is* a surprise! We haven't met—let me see, 'twas when I was serving as High Sheriff—not these six years—eh? And heartily glad I am to see you again," he continued, giving a rough shake to the hand he had grasped so firmly during the progress of his reminiscences. "I'm only sorry that Lady Meadowes and my daughter should be absent, to make an old man's welcome less acceptable. But, as you see, the works going on here are of a nature to drive 'em away."

Mr. Eustace could almost have fancied that the motives of his visit were discovered.

"But now I think on't," resumed Sir Mark, interrupting his train of reflections, "you must be staying with Lady Harriet? You are perhaps in the house with them at Radensford?"

"I left the Manor, Sir, only a couple of hours ago; and have the pleasure of assuring you that, when we parted last night, Lady Meadowes and your daughter were in excellent health and spirits."

"That's right—that's well! And what's again right and well, your news will spare me a trot to the Manor this afternoon, for which I could ill spare time;—though, to do the old shooting-pony justice, she carries me to the village in less than a quarter of an hour."

"No visit of inspection, I can assure you, is at all necessary," rejoined Mr. Eustace, cheerfully. "I am here to answer every question you may be inclined to ask."

"Then let 'em be asked and answered over the breakfast-table," said Sir Mark, cordially. "The bell rang five minutes ago—just as I spied you. But a fresh supply of steaks and

hot cakes will soon set matters to rights. Here you! John—Dick—Manesty!—Take Mr. Eustace's dogs round to the stable-yard; unless," he continued, with a sly smile, "petticoat-government being in interregnum here just now, you like to have the poor fellows with you in the breakfast-parlour?"

The dogs being Lady Harriet's and not his own, Mr. Eustace preferred seeing them consigned to their proper place;—and having given up his gun to one of the keepers, he followed Sir Mark into the cheerful breakfast-room, liberally supplied with cold turkeypoult and home-smoked ham, pressed beef and mealy potatoes, hot bread, marmalade, and a smoking broil;—all that maketh glad the heart of sportsman, and put to the blush the meagre, dowager fare of Radensford Manor.

Before Sir Mark had despatched his first bowl of tea, he acquainted his visitor with all he had to tell concerning the nature and motive of his improvements; adding a declaration that, had he known how lonesome he should feel in this first separation from his

womankind, he would have seen the moat further, before he thought of filling it up. Then came the avowal that the thought of filling it would never have occurred to him, but for the influence it was supposed to exercise over the health of the best and dearest of wives.

"You're not old enough," added Sir Mark, "to understand that sort of thing at present. It takes years and years, Mr. Eustace, to ripen one's boyish notions of sentimental love into the right-down manly feeling that binds a man to the wife of his choice, and the fireside gladdened by their children. But when the time comes, Sir, for you to make the discovery, mind my words, 'twill be the best-spent and happiest day of your life."

The young snipe-shooter, who for twenty minutes past had been getting smaller and smaller in his shoes, overpowered by the hearty spirit of his host, his liberal sentiments and liberal housekeeping, enhanced by the fine old plate, china and pictures, which implied small need to descend to stratagem to secure a

partner for the daughter and heiress of the house, gave a timid assent. At length, having breakfasted as became one of the old baronets whose bronzed faces smiled upon him from the walls of the breakfast-parlour, rather than as befitted a fastidious young Pelham of St. James's Street, he took pity on the evident desire of his host to return to his workmen, and rose to depart: or perhaps took pity on himself,—to whom Sir Mark, cheered by a copious succession of the "cups that cheer but not inebriate," insisted on showing and explaining the system of the forcing-pumps, by which the still moist moat had been partially desiccated.

"Unless I am back by twelve o'clock," he said, in apology for his hasty departure, "Lady Harriet, who is not aware of my intended visit, will be anxious and fidgety."

"Ay, that's the worst of my dear kind old neighbour,—a sad fidget,—a sad fidget!" cried Sir Mark. "I can't understand for my part, how she ever came to admit you under her roof, coming, as you say you do, from a district

where fever is raging. Why, bless your soul! Lady Harriet would run away from the nettle rash, if old Burnaby took it into his head to make her believe it was infectious."

Mr. Eustace endeavoured to make him understand that his visit to Radensford Manor was thoroughly independent of the will and choice of his aunt. But Sir Mark was too much pre-engrossed to listen. His thoughts were divided between the wagons of earth he saw slowly approaching over the turf;—and the assurances to be conveyed to his wife and daughter, that (please God, and Lady Harriet permitting), he would meet his daughter in the family pew the following Sunday, and "take his Sunday beef and pudden, afterwards, at the Manor." Sir Mark proposed the plan as frankly as he would have wished such a scheme to be proposed to himself.—The old fellow's heart was as open as his hand.—He could understand no motive for demur in matters of hospitality.

By the time Eustace had traversed half a mile of the jolly old baronet's property, on his

way back to the narrow estate and penurious habits of the Warnefords, he felt lowered in his own estimation. Absurd, to suppose that the proprietors of such a house as Meadowes Court could descend to paltry plotting in behalf of their daughter; even were she a thousand times less charming than the pretty Amy whom he had been intent on keeping at a distance. As he glanced at the autumnal rose which Sir Mark had snatched from the porch, and charged him to convey to his wife, with his best love and blessing, and which alas, was already fading in the button-hole of his shooting-jacket, he began to be aware that, though a very fine gentleman in Rotten Row, he was but a poor creature now that his varnished boot was exchanged for a shooting-shoe; and its sole planted on honest wholesome turf, a hundred miles distant from the sooty herbage of Hyde Park.

CHAPTER VII.

"No! don't put it into water to refresh it, please,"—said Amy, on receiving from him, on his return, her father's message and flower,—to convey to Lady Meadowes, who was undergoing one of her "poorly" days, and had not yet made her appearance.—"My mother would prefer to have it in its present state,—exactly as it was sent by papa.—Particularly, accompanied by such a pleasant message.—Sunday at church—eat his Sunday dinner with us! We shall all be so happy!—It seems so long since we left him. After all, Mr. Eustace, the song says true, 'There's no place like home.'"

William Eustace gazed after the animated girl as she hurried out of the room with the rose in her hand, and a flush of joy brightening her pleasant face: overcome by the confidingness of her manner,—by her deep sense of conjugal affection,—as well as by the consciousness of his own inferiority of nature. He understood, now, how much Eton and Oxford had extracted of good out of it, in exchange for the little they had conferred.—Virgil and Horace,—or faith in the affection of a woman of forty-five for a husband of sixty-six!—The odds were certainly not in favour of the classics.

But it was written in the book of fate that the Sunday dinner so sanguinely anticipated was not to come off.—Sir Mark sent word by Manesty, that he was vexed and disappointed, but that "a friend out of the West of England having come unexpectedly to stay with him, he was under the necessity of remaining at Meadowes Court, to do the honours to his guest."

This excuse passed as current with his wife

and daughter, as, with most people, it would have done if issued by the Bank of England, whose promises are, in these our times, the only ones implicitly confided in. For Sir Mark was essentially a man of his word;—a man incapable of swerving a hair's breadth from the truth;—and on the present occasion, the pretext, for a pretext it was, was none of his devising. Old Nichols, once his foster-brother, now his butler, suggested what he had often heard suggested by his master, "anything rather than alarm my lady and Miss Amy!—"

The truth was that Sir Mark, pretty nearly for the first time in his life, was unwell and under medical superintendence; and Doctor Burnaby having decided that he must on no account leave the house in the present indefinite stage of his complaint, the innocent subterfuge was concocted between them.

An equally innocent spirit of coquetry having caused Lady Meadowes and her daughter to await the coming of this much-loved, simple-hearted husband and father not only in their "Sunday best," but prepared with all the news

of the more than ten days they had passed asunder, and all the honey of love they had been hiving for the moment of their meeting, the disappointment was great. They wished the visitor from the West of England back at the Land's End; and already began to prepare for the happiness of the following Sunday.

The under-keeper who brought the message, meanwhile, his tongue being unloosed by the excellent quality of the Manor ale, had let fall hints of the truth in the servants' hall; which would not have failed of reaching Lady Meadowes through her maid, had she indulged in the vulgar habit of gossiping with her attendant, common among finer ladies. But Amy was in such systematic waiting upon her mother, that this was impossible. Both retired to rest, that night, satisfied that Sir Mark had been enjoying his claret with an old friend; and hoping it was only the gravity of the Sabbath evening which had rendered Mr. Eustace even more taciturn than his wont. For while Lady Harriet was dozing over Porteus's Sermons (the pet theology of her girlhood) her nephew's

depression had seemed to amount almost to indisposition.

Next morning, for a wonder, he joined the family breakfast-table, and watched with quiet admiration the assiduity of Amy in concocting and carrying up-stairs her mother's tea. Not all Lady Harriet's entreaties would induce her to delegate the task to menial hands.

"I always wait upon mamma, at home," said Amy. "Pray allow me to carry up her breakfast. She would not enjoy it unless in her customary way. Invalids have fancies. Excuse me, dear Lady Harriet;—and let me do as at home."

Amy carried her point. But Lady Harriet, who, judging from her own feelings, felt that the dutiful daughter was gaining too great an advantage over the heart of her sister's son, began to exclaim against the dangers of morbid sensibility.—"Lady Meadowes's dry toast might just as well have been administered by her maid."

Mr. Eustace thought otherwise. And he managed to think otherwise than Lady Harriet's

thoughts, during the remainder of breakfast; and oppose every word she uttered, till she began to consider him exceedingly disrespectful. The simple truth now occurred to her,—that he was ill. If he saw cause to find fault that his three little cousins, after breakfasting in their nursery, were allowed to murmur over the Barbauld's hymns they were committing to memory, in a corner of the breakfast-room, for the better chance of embellishing their pages with traces of Dundee marmalade, her ladyship little surmised that the origin of poor William's captiousness was an aching head, rather than an aching heart.

Amy was kinder. Amy was more considerate. When she came back from her mother's room to hurry through her own tepid breakfast, she felt real pity for the cross young man who was gazing out of the window, with brows contracted by suffering, at Lady Harriet's gaudy autumnal parterres of China asters, African marigolds, and marvel of Peru.

"I am sure you are not well this morning, Mr. Eustace," said she, in the frankest manner.

"You don't look like yourself. You are quite heated and feverish."

"Thank you. I am not ill that I am aware of. A little head-ache, perhaps, after the ponderous Sunday fare of yesterday. Roast beef and plum-pudding (especially if eaten together after my dear aunt's heretical House of Hanover imaginations), are dyspepsia and death."

"Dyspepsia,—as I perceive:—I trust not *death!*" said Amy, smiling as she finished her breakfast:—Lady Harriet having already proceeded with praiseworthy exactitude, to her daily conference with the housekeeper. "But come into the library, Mr. Eustace. There, we shall find a good fire. You only want warming to be on a par with the rest of us."

The captious young gentleman clearly wanted more. For even while seated beside a huge fire piled up with blazing beech-roots and sparkling coal, he began to shiver and look blue. The delinquent himself imagined that his qualmish sensations arose from being conscience-stricken:—and he longed to make a clean breast of it, and avow to the girl who

evinced such ingenuous sympathy in his distemperature, his penitent self-conviction of coxcombry and presumption. But how was this to be done without insulting her by an explanation of his former impertinent surmises? He sat, therefore, aguish and depressed, but apparently stupid and indifferent; while Amy prepared her mother's work to be ready when Lady Meadowes was able to make her usual noontide appearance.

Grateful, however, did he feel for her cheerful conversation. He had never before noticed how great a charm the habit of living with a gentle invalid had imparted to her manner. No bursts of hilarity,—no impetuosity of step or gesture.—It was more like a tame fawn gliding about a room, than a lively healthy girl with the first bloom of youth still mantling on her cheek.

At first, indeed, it was difficult to withdraw her attention from the pattern she was tracing on the canvas, or the worsted she was sorting. But at length, he touched upon his visit to Meadowes Court; and the sluice-gates of

mutual confidence flew open in a moment. Tears came into Amy's eyes as she adverted to her disappointment of the preceding day.—But they soon evaporated when she began to talk of home.—How was her father looking? Did he seem fatigued?—Was he harassed by his workmen?—Was he anxious for her return?"

When these queries had been answered, came secondary inquiries. Had he spoken to old Nichols?—Were Blanche and Sting admitted into the breakfast-room?—Did he notice in the hall her pair of paroquets?—No child could have been simpler in her questioning:—no child more eager for his replies.

A colder-hearted man than William Eustace would have found it difficult to resist the earnestness of her sweet face,—the mutable expression of her hazel eyes. Still, though inexpressibly touched by the *naiveté* of poor Amy's country-bred manners, and the expressive animation of her countenance, he felt too much oppressed to answer as he could have wished the catechism to which he was subjected.

Much within an hour, partly owing to the genial warmth of the fire opposite to which he was seated, partly from unaccountable weariness, he dropped asleep.

The moment Amy perceived the condition of her companion, she crept quietly out of the room, and went in search of Lady Harriet. Decorum or hypocrisy, call it which you will, had no influence over the impulses of Amy Meadowes.

"I am afraid, dear Lady Harriet," said she, "that Mr. Eustace is ill. He has had a sort of shivering fit; and is now asleep in the drawing-room. Pray go and see him, as soon as he wakes again. I will stay up-stairs in mamma's dressing-room, not to disturb him. But he has either caught cold, or is what Miss Honeywood used to call *couver*-ing an illness."

Lady Harriet tapped her on the shoulder, and smiled. She would have said—"foolish little girl! why so over-solicitous?" but for the fear of hurting Amy's feelings. But after noticing her susceptibility, she determined that so decided a case of sympathy between her young friend and

her nephew rendered it desirable that he should return to his infected home in the North, sooner than the bulletin of its bills of mortality seemed to justify.

She scarcely knew whether to be more amused or vexed by Amy's solicitudes. But before twenty-four hours had elapsed, her mind was made up. Mr. Eustace's increasing indisposition, which before night assumed a character of alarming lethargy, determined her the following morning to summon Dr. Burnaby, her family physician; who, residing at the neighbouring town of Cardington, nearly ten miles off, was only called in at Radensford Manor in cases of emergency. He came; and the grave face with which he contemplated his now nearly insensible patient, sufficed to excite the old lady's utmost alarm, even before his mode of cross-questioning her concerning the nature of the epidemic from which her nephew had fled, and the length of time which had elapsed since he established himself at the Manor, apprised her of the nature of his attack.

"A fever, with something of typhoid symp-

toms?" cried the blunt old doctor, repeating the words in which Lady Louisa Eustace's letter had explained the matter to her sister:—"Stuff and nonsense! Why not say typhus fever at once? Why not put people on their guard?"

He was almost inclined to rescind the opinion, however, when he saw to what a state of agony mere mention of the dreaded word had reduced Lady Harriet. Not on her own account. She was conscious of her own ripeness of years. She was prepared to suffer,—she was prepared to die. But she was *not* prepared to witness the sufferings or death of the promising children committed to her charge by her departed son; whose well-being she regarded as a sacred deposit. It would scarcely have been desirable just then for Lady Louisa Eustace to have encountered her indignant and terrified sister.

"But my dear, good lady," cried Doctor Burnaby, alarmed at the outpourings of acrimony he had brought forth,—"where's the use of wasting all these hard words on other people? Better turn round, and look about you, and see

what's to be done. 'Tisn't altogether civil, Lady Harriet, to make so sure my patient will die. I flatter myself I've brought worse cases through, before now."

"I was not thinking of your patient, doctor; very dear though he is to me. I was thinking of my three poor boys. What will become of *them*, doctor?"

"Why not send them to the Rectory, dear Lady Harriet?" said Amy, who was standing, pale as death, listening to the doctor's award.

"When I am not certain but that they might carry with them the germ of the fever?" she replied, severely. "Fie, Amy! Sophia Burton is the only child of her mother, and she is a widow."

Doctor Barnaby looked better pleased with his old friend now, than while she was reviling her absent sister.

"If you're not afraid of trusting them to me and my housekeeper, dear lady," said he, "*I'll* undertake the bantlings, and bring them back safe to you when the battle is over."

"My dear doctor!—"

"To be plain with you, however," he continued, "I never saw much good arise from running out of the way of infection. I'm not clear that it does not evince an unbecoming mistrust of the providence of God.—But of that sin, I'm afraid by the blueness of your lips and tremor of your hand, your ladyship already stands convicted," added he. "I'll be bound you've not a thread of pulse to be felt at this moment."

"I will not boast," replied Lady Harriet, gravely. — "I confess to being at my wits' end."

"Then lose no time, Miss Meadowes, my dear," resumed the kind-hearted but gruff old man, "in getting the children and their traps packed up, that I may carry them off without further delay. I've given my instructions in the sick-room.—Elsewhere, keep vinegar burning, and don't let more people than are necessary wait upon the East wing.—I shall be here again betimes in the morning.—The case is urgent."

An alarming word, as it recurred to Lady Harriet's mind when her three darlings were

off, — safe, as she already fancied, — and she heard the sound of Dr. Burnaby's departing wheels. She had mustered courage to avoid bidding them good-bye. It would not have been prudent, after her attendance on the sick-room; and she knew she could trust to the thoughtful Amy to make every arrangement for their comfort. But another painful duty was awaiting her. She must write to Lady Louisa Eustace.

"Not to-day.—To-day, you have nothing to say but what is painful," pleaded Amy. "Wait till Dr. Burnaby has seen his patient again. To-morrow may produce a favourable turn."

"Or a fatal one!"

"No, dear Lady Harriet. He assured me the danger was not imminent.—He said it was impossible for even the most experienced medical man as yet to predict the issue."

"Still, my sister ought to be apprised."

"To-day, you might, perhaps, write hastily.—To-morrow, you will have recovered your composure."

Lady Harriet shook her head. She foresaw too truly that her distress and agitation were only beginning.—But it was difficult to contest a point with Amy's gentle nature; and Lady Harriet was too much depressed to be very contentious.

"Another favour, if I might ask it," said the kind-hearted girl, taking courage from a first success.—"Do not, at present, alarm poor mamma by announcing the nature of Mr. Eustace's seizure. — Her room is at too great a distance from his to expose her to any danger of infection; and to-day, she is far too much indisposed to leave it. Were she to know the truth, her first impulse would be to return home immediately, in order to relieve your household of additional trouble while illness is in the house: and then—"

She paused. But Lady Harriet was listening so attentively as to require the full conclusion of the sentence.

"And then, I should lose the satisfaction of assisting and comforting you under your great

anxieties,"—said Amy, not altogether without confusion of countenance.

Again, Lady Harriet shook her head. She was half afraid that this generous sympathy might originate in over-solicitude for the invalid. Though, a moment before, she had been disposed to regard her nephew as a condemned man, she was still susceptible to the repugnance entertained against an unequal match by the elders of a family submitted to the tyranny of "public opinion."

CHAPTER VIII.

Miss Meadowes's first anxiety on learning, the following morning, that Dr. Burnaby's patient had passed a restless night, was to forestal the possibility of a visit from her father.

"We must give up the hope of seeing you for the present, dearest papa," she wrote, in all haste, to Meadowes Court.—"You must on no account add to our anxieties by approaching this infected house.—Stop your workmen if you can; for we must return home, in order to release poor Lady Harriet from additional

care and trouble. Her nephew Mr. Eustace is in a dangerous state from an attack of fever.—Dr. Burnaby seems very anxious: and so am I, till I can get my dearest mother removed out of danger. Do not think of coming. But send the carriage for us to-morrow morning;—early, if you please. Mamma is a little weak and nervous to-day; or I should propose your sending this very evening. God bless you, dear darling papa! No more, since we shall meet so soon, from

"Your own

"AMY."

Alas! this letter was fated to remain unopened for evermore.—It never reached the hands of the kindly being to whom it was addressed. When Miss Meadowes stole from her dressing-room in search of a servant through whom it could be forwarded without alarming her mother or worrying Lady Harriet, the first person she met on the stairs

was Dr. Burnaby, on his way to the remote apartment of his patient.

"Go back, child!" cried he, motioning her away. "Didn't you hear me say, yesterday, that there was to be no communication between the East wing and the rest of the house?"

"Nor have I approached it.—But as you have not yet seen your patient, dear Dr. Burnaby, and I hoped that—I thought that—"

"No matter what you thought or hoped. Go, child, and attend upon your mother. I hear she is ailing; and I can't look in upon her to-day, Amy, on account of this unlucky fever.—Go, my dear young lady. I am waited for yonder."

Away he hurried to the sick room, where Lady Harriet was eagerly expecting him with anything but a satisfactory report of the sufferer; and very long did the half-hour appear to Amy which she spent in loitering about the corridor, instead of obeying his injunction and

returning to watch the slumbers of Lady Meadowes. She was in hopes of catching from a distance the sound of Dr. Burnaby's voice in some parting injunction to one of the servants in attendance on William Eustace. She fancied that, even from the tone, though the words reached her not, she might be able to infer whether his view of the case were more favourable than at his last visit.

While thus anxiously listening, a whisper indeed caught her ear. But it was not uttered in the direction of the east wing. It arose from the hall below, where Dr. Burnaby's servant was waiting, and where the butler appeared to be questioning him beside the open door.

"*He* may get through it. At his age, young blood works its way through anything," were the expressions or nearly the expressions that reached the ears of Amy.

"God grant it!" murmured the tremulous voice of Blagrove, Lady Harriet's aged butler.

"But I know Master han't no hope o' the old gentleman," resumed the other speaker.

"He told Mr. Nichols when he left the house an hour agone, that 'twas a question if he'd live through the night."

"The old gentleman!"—"Mr. Nichols!"—Poor Amy stood paralysed. Had she heard aright?—While asking herself the question, she had to clutch the oaken balustrade of the staircase, to save herself from being precipitated to the bottom. She would have screamed aloud a question to the whisperers, that a more articulate answer might dispel or confirm her terrible apprehensions. But her voice died on her lips. She could not call,—she could not breathe;—dumb and motionless, as under the influence of a night-mare.

A minute afterwards, however, the two serving-men, who were still gossiping and grieving together, saw Miss Meadowes totter across the hall, breathless and incoherent.

"*Is it true?*" she faltered, seizing the arm of Dr. Burnaby's incautious servant. "Answer me this moment!—My father,—"

The venerable butler with an admonitory glance at his companion, endeavoured to with-

draw the young lady's hand, and to place her in a chair.

"We were talking, Miss Amy, of poor Mr. Eustace—"

"You were *not*. You said the old gentleman was sinking fast. Oh! my dear dear father!" cried Amy, wringing her hands. "But I will go to Dr. Burnaby,"—cried she, dreading that she might not from his awe-stricken attendant obtain the truth. "*He* will not deceive me—"

"Master will never forgive me," ejaculated the man,—thus confirming the worst fears of Miss Meadowes. "He ordered me not to drop a syllable on't in the house."

Almost before he had concluded his inconsiderate remark, the distracted girl had darted through the open hall-door; dashed along the gravel walk,—flung open the wicket and reached the stable yard. And while the two servants stood deliberating whether they dared intimate to Dr. Burnaby what had occurred, before he had terminated his visit to the chamber of

sickness which had already assumed in the house the most painful importance, Amy was assisting the groom to place a saddle on George Warneford's pony. Unaware of her object or intentions, the man dreamed not of disobeying the orders of one of his lady's guests; and as Miss Meadowes was attired in a morning wrapper, without even a shawl or bonnet, it did not occur to him that the pony was preparing for her own use, till he saw her jump upon it and canter off.

Still, he fancied that she was only returning to the hall-door. Nor was it till old Blagrove hobbled down with inquiries and reproofs for the assistance he had given, that he could be persuaded the young lady was bent on so mad an exploit as an expedition to Meadowes Court, thus accoutred, and unattended.

"Saddle a horse and follow her instantly, Will!" said the anxious old servant, "or my lady will never forgive us."

But alas! the only available horse in Lady Harriet's scanty stud, had been already des-

patched to meet the early post with a letter intimating to the Eustaces the danger of their son.

The next resource, and the old man did not hesitate to lay it under contribution, was to despatch Dr. Burnaby's carriage in quest of the half-frantic Miss Meadowes. The pony's paces would scarcely enable her to outstrip pursuit, if the coachman exerted himself.—It was, however, some time before he was made to understand the urgency of the case.—Unaccustomed to obey any orders but those of his somewhat peremptory master, "It was as much as his place was worth," he argued, "if the doctor, whose time was so precious, should be kept waiting by his absence."

When again and again assured that if he made no effort to preserve Miss Meadowes from danger, his place would be in far greater jeopardy, his compliance came too late.—By the time the lumbering chariot reached the high road, the frantic girl had long quitted it for the fields.—A mile of the distance dividing her from the doomed spot where her father

was "sinking fast," might be saved by the bridle-road :—even though she had to jump off and open gates :—even though the way was rough and dangerous.

She urged the pony on.—She became hoarse by urging it on,—for whip she had none.—Her hair streamed back from her pale face—her dress was discomposed by gusts of autumnal wind. The stumbling of the pony over the stubbly furrows, more than once nearly flung her nerveless form from the saddle. But still she went on,—unheeding ;—absorbed in that one overpowering uncertainty.—Was she too late ?—Was the old man her father yet alive ?—

And now, she is through the hazel copse.—She has crushed down the blackened bean-haulm of the last field dividing her from the paddock. Her breath is gone. Her cheek is wan and clammy as death. For she is within sight of the old house, and can as yet discern no indication of what awaits her. There is not a labourer stirring. The works are as completely stopped at the moat-side as if her

morning's letter had reached its destination and accomplished its object. The barrows lie upturned. The wheel is broken at the cistern.

Scarcely dares she lift her eyes towards the windows of her father's room. But a hasty glance shows that they are open,—wide open.—Is this a sign that all is over, or that air is required for the dying man?

The doors, too, stand wide apart. Not a servant to be seen. Almost before she has leapt from her pony, however, and left it to its own devices, Blanche and Sting, who run barking out at its approach, change their angry yelp into joyous howls of recognition; and keep jumping lovingly upon her, and impeding her movements.

"Down—down!" she rather shrieks than utters,—almost wild with the tumult of her agonising fears. As she rushes up-stairs, a housemaid who sits on the window-seat of the lobby,—half-dozing through excess of watching in the sick room which she has recently quitted,—starts up to beset her with exclamations.

"Oh! Miss Amy—why are you come?—

Master wouldn't hear of you and my lady being sent for.—You can't be of no use, Miss. The doctor says you can't.—Nobody can't be of no use agin the will of Almighty God!"—

Amy paused for a moment,—not to listen;—but with her hand pressed upon her heart, as if to repress its terrible pulsation. She looked hard in the woman's face; but could not utter a sound to frame the question she was dying to ask. Her earnest eyes spoke for her.

"Yes, Miss,—he is still alive," said the woman, following her up the stairs.—"But 'twill soon be over. Better not go in.—Better not see him in his present state. My poor dear master won't know you. He has not even known Mr. Nichols these two days past."

And when Amy had glided more like a spirit than a living being through the open door of the chamber, intensely fumigated with the same ill-omened aromatics which seemed to bring with them the fatal atmosphere of the Manor House, the first object that met her eyes was the poor broken-hearted faithful old Nichols; sitting

with clasped hands, apparently stupefied by tears and vigils,—watching beside the bed where a long motionless ridge denoted that a human form was extended.—Even when Amy had thrown herself upon it, in the belief that her father was gone for ever, she did not for many minutes perceive that though unconscious, he still breathed.—Old Nichols raised her gently and drew her down upon her knees to the bedside.

"Let him die in peace, my dear young lady," sobbed the old man.—"His moments are numbered. Let him die in peace—"

"Father—father!—dear darling papa!" cried Amy,—regardless of these remonstrances, and believing that though the eyes of the sufferer were dim and glassy, and his limbs motionless and cold, he would be roused to consciousness by the well-known voice of his child,—"listen to me. It is Amy:—Amy come to nurse you, come to love you. Dear papa,—answer me, look at me!"

But no change of that wan and rigid face denoted that poor Sir Mark was conscious of

her presence.—So little of life remained, that it could scarcely be called existence. The solemnity of death was upon that honest face. That honest heart had all but ceased to beat. The poor dogs whining and cringing at the door which though open they dared not enter, seemed instinctively to understand what the distracted daughter would not believe, that the kindly hand which had so often caressed them would never be upraised again.

An angry voice and a hurried step were at that moment audible on the stairs. But the moment they reached the threshold of the sick-room, both were hushed.—Dr. Burnaby, who had driven off as hard as his horses could carry him, in hopes to intercept the visit of poor Amy to the infected house, and on finding himself too late, had begun by chiding everybody, and railing even at the poor girl whose danger was the origin of his wrath, no sooner glanced at the bed, than he checked his hurried words and footsteps. Gravely approaching it, he closed the eyes of the dead.

A moment afterwards, he was enabled partly

to fulfil his intentions by raising in his arms and bearing from the room the inanimate form of the afflicted daughter, to whom this act had announced the fatal truth. On recovering her consciousness, Amy found herself in a carriage, supported on the shoulder of the good doctor, whose tears were falling on her hand.

"You are not taking me away from him," she faltered,—struggling to regain her self-command—"Let me go to my father. Let me go to my dear, dear father."

"No, my child," replied the physician, in a tone of grave authority. "He is beyond reach of your affection and duty. Prove how much you have loved him, Amy, by devoting yourself at once to the consolation of your surviving parent:—your mother, who has none else to comfort her;—your mother, Amy, entrusted by *him* and the Almighty to your filial care!".

CHAPTER IX.

THE country gossips in the narrow circle of Radensford predicted of course that poor feeble Lady Meadowes would be extinguished at once by the sudden calamity which had befallen her. Experience confuted their calculations.—Persons of infirm health are often roused and excited by a shock, fatal to others of more robust habits. On learning at one and the same moment that she had lost the affectionate partner of her life, and that the daughter so dear to them both was in an alarming condition, she stationed herself by the bedside of her dear Amy, prepared to assuage her suffer-

ings and sustain her courage.—Lady Harriet herself, with all her severity of self-control, could not have exhibited greater strength of body and mind than Lady Meadowes.

"All is well with her, my dear lady. I foresaw what would be her state of mind," whispered Mr. Henderson in a subdued tone to the lady of the Manor House, when summoned to exhort the afflicted invalid, who stood in no need of better counsel than that of her own excellent head and heart.—"She has forgotten *herself*.—Her own ailments are as nothing, now that others need her assistance."

Without ministering spiritually to her sorrows, however, the aid of the good Rector was invaluable in the fulfilment of other duties to which the widow was unequal.—The sickness already assuming an epidemic character, was so appalling in the neighbourhood, that an early interment of the dead was judged desirable. The infection must not be suffered to extend.—There appeared little hope that the afflicted daughter would escape;—nor might even the prayers of the terrified Lady Harriet avail for the preserva-

tion of the beloved boys whom Dr. Burnaby had taken in charge. But no precautions must be neglected.

Within four days, therefore, of the sad event which had deprived Meadowes Court of its master, he was laid in the family vault. No need to look into his testamentary instructions to determine that question. Where the eight baronets bearing his name, from sire to son, were gathered together in the dust, he also was to be laid.—Thither was he followed in all sincerity of love by his nearest neighbours: Admiral Tremenheere, the kind physician, and a few magistrates of the district,—emulators of his uprightness and right-heartedness.—And but that her only child lay insensible upon the bed of sickness, his widow would have been herself conveyed into the church, to meet on the brink of the grave him from whom she had been so rarely parted, since the day on which they were conjoined together at the altar.

When the will *was* opened, it appeared that the desire of the testator to be buried with the

utmost simplicity in the church where he had been so long accustomed to worship, had been strictly fulfilled.—Nay more, the Rector and the physician, his constant friends and associates, were nominated executors. The testamentary paper was indicted in a few homely phrases.—A deed executed on his marriage when issue male was anticipated, assigned to Lady Meadowes only four hundred per annum to be levied on the estate, which he had a right to charge with dowry.—But he now constituted her his sole heir; certain," he added, "that she would act towards their only child, in every future emergency as he would act himself if living to watch over her interests."

"Right—all right—quite right," was the reciprocal exclamation of the two executors.—"Lady Meadowes will enjoy something more than two thousand a year for life; and be able to make a suitable provision for her daughter, should she determine on marriage."

Though prudent and practical men, they were not base enough to fancy that the easy circumstances secured to the bereaved mother

and daughter would reconcile them to the severity of their loss. But they rejoiced, and Lady Harriet rejoiced, when the moment poor Amy's comparative convalescence rendered removal possible, and Lady Meadowes insisted on returning to the house replete with associations so painful, that their sorrow would not be aggravated by those sordid cares which, at such moments, too often increase the poignancy of family affliction.

They re-entered the gates of Meadowes Court overpowered by their griefs:—discerning nothing in those desolate rooms but the absence of the eager step and the silence of the joyous voice which had animated their life and love.—But they felt that they were come to abide for evermore where *he* had lived and loved:—to cherish his memory:—to talk of him, to think of him, and prepare to rejoin him in a happier world.

In their presence, the question had never been mooted whether the malignant fever, to which Sir Mark Meadowes had unquestionably fallen a victim, originated in the miasma created by the disturbance of the old moat; or whether it had been introduced into the neighbourhood

and communicated to him by young Eustace, at his ill-timed visit.—The Eustace family persisted for the rest of their lives in asserting that their son and heir had all but fallen a victim to the infection created by poor Sir Mark Meadowes's rash experiment in desiccation. But many were of opinion,—Dr. Burnaby openly, Lady Harriet tacitly, — that William Eustace had brought with him the germs of the fatal malady, and communicated them to one predisposed by local influences to fructify the evil.—For months to come, nay, for ensuing years, the question was one of the favourite paradoxes of the neighbourhood. It was only the good Rector of Radensford who from the first discountenanced the discussion.

"To what purpose pursue an investigation," said he, "the solution of which cannot restore the dead, and must unquestionably give pain to the living?—We have lost our friend. Let us respect the decree of Him who has taken him from us. No human prevision could have forestalled the fatal event."

He was especially anxious that the conva-

lescence of Mr. Eustace might not be retarded, through by the remarks occasionally extorted from Lady Harriet by the risk to which her darling grand-children had been subjected. Though, had it been asserted in her presence that Sir Mark Meadowes had taken the fever from her nephew, she would have deeply resented it, she could not help plainly writing to her sister Louisa that, had the children fallen victims to it, she would never have pardoned her having billeted William upon her house.

"Even now," she wrote,—"now that he is perfectly recovered and on his way to Torquay for change of air, previous to rejoining you, to enable me to submit the poor Manor House to a complete fumigation preparatory to the return of my treasures, I can scarcely persuade myself that all danger is past.—We have undergone a terrible shock.—The loss sustained by my kind neighbours at Meadowes Court is alas! irreparable.—Amy is broken-hearted; and her mother will never lift up her head again. They would see me, I know, if I visited them. But I have not courage, my dear Louisa, to go and witness

the terrible desolation of a house thus cruelly deprived of the fondest of husbands and fathers."

She went, however, at last; prompted less by the desire of soothing their trouble, than by the notion that it became her consequence to afford immediate countenance to the widow. Lady Harriet as first in rank of the neighbourhood, considered herself bound to take the initiative step in its social measures. It became her to show an example which might regulate the vacillations of public opinion.

On the present occasion, at least, nothing of the kind was needed. High and low, rich and poor, all were anxious to offer their tribute of sympathy to the mourners; and all were equally edified with Lady Harriet by the composure and resignation exhibited by the mother and daughter.—Amy, indeed, could not always repress the outbursts of anguish which her mother's longer experience of the trials of life enabled her to subdue till she could weep unobserved on the congenial bosom of her daughter. But on the whole, their reverend counsellor found far less

occasion than he had anticipated to exhort them to submission, and even Dr. Burnaby had almost ceased to scold. Their repinings and tears were so exclusively reserved for each other, that their nearest friends were deceived.

The executors took upon themselves to suggest a temporary removal from Meadowes Court, as likely to be beneficial to the health of both; and favourable to the completion of the improvements, too far advanced not to render it necessary to carry them out. But Lady Meadowes entreated to be left in peace. Winter was at hand. The early frosts were come. No further danger was to be apprehended from infection. All she asked was to be allowed to remain, at least till spring, without the smallest change or disturbance. She felt and Amy felt, that the slightest alteration in the place or establishment would dispel the charm under which they seemed to live,—as if *he* were still present with them,—as if *he* might again return to occupy his accustomed seat and resume his place in the domestic circle.

"Leave Meadowes Court?—Endure the

hurry and noise of Brighton?—Surround ourselves with strangers?" was Amy's indignant exclamation after the departure of Lady Harriet, who, at the instigation of the old doctor, had undertaken the task of proposing such a measure. "Oh! mother, mother!—How little they understand us! Sometimes, in those happy old times which I feel now that I never sufficiently appreciated, I used to fancy that I should like to make a few acquaintances, in active life. But I know better now, mother.—I know how little there can be in the world to compare with the happiness we have enjoyed here—"

Lady Meadowes replied by a tender pressure of her hand. "Fear nothing, my child," said she. "There is no chance of any desire on my part to quit this place.—I have never lived in the world, Amy. The position in life from which your father raised me afforded no connections to tempt either of us from our retirement. His few relatives disclaimed me. My own resented their conduct. We became isolated,—estranged from everything and everybody—"

"And all the happier for it,—far far the better and happier for it,—" interrupted her daughter.

"That your father was content with the destiny he had created, sufficcs. And these peculiar circumstances, my dearest child, will at least justify the tranquil seclusion to which I look forward."

"Even in our affliction, mother," observed Amy, after a few moments' pause, "my Aunt Davenport has never written,—never inquired—"

Lady Meadowes started. The name of "Aunt Davenport" applied to the sister of her husband, from whom she had received such slights, seemed to jar upon her ear.

"Can she, do you think, be ignorant of the event?" persisted Amy.

"Lest she should be so, our kind friend Mr. Henderson wrote to apprise her. A few cold words were returned by Lord Davenport;—a mere formal acknowledgment of his letter."

"My poor dear cordial father did not deserve

to have such a sister," was all that Amy could reply.

"*She* did not deserve such a brother. But let us talk no more of her, Amy. Let us never mention the name of Davenport again."

"Never—never.—We must only love each other the more, mother, for being alone in the world."

"Your cousin, Sir Jervis Meadowes has written,—courteously at least,—more could not be expected from him, in reply to the communication of my poor husband's executors."

"Sir Jervis!" repeated Amy, musingly. "I am glad he does not bear my father's name. How I should have grieved to hear it applied to a stranger."

"It matters little. We shall never meet.—Sir Jervis behaved through life ungraciously to your father. It is not likely he will attempt to renew with *us* the acquaintance which respect for the head of his family never prompted him to keep up."

It was on a dreary afternoon, towards the end of December, this conversation took place.—

Sleet was falling audibly against the windows, the blinds of which were partially drawn down; and though Lady Meadowes's sofa was drawn close to the fire, she lay cold and shivering. Just the season of the year when Christmas cheer, and Christmas charity, had been wont to brighten the time-worn old mansion! Just the hour of day when they were accustomed to listen for the tread of poor Sir Mark across the hall, on his return from his day's sport;—announced by the joyful cry of old Sting, who lay on the mat awaiting his arrival. At that hour, they seemed to miss more than ever the kindly voice and face so sure to impart cheerfulness to the hearth.

Old Nichols often crept in at dusk, with a log in his hand, on pretext of attending to the fire; but in reality to certify to himself that my lady and Miss Amy were not endangering their health by what he called "taking on." If he found them engaged in quiet talk, he would creep out again, without any attempt to fulfil his pretended purpose; thereby betraying that he came only because he knew *their* heaviness

of heart must be still harder to bear than his own.

On the evening in question, while he stood inquiring whether "my lady was pleased to wish that the lamp should be brought in," there came a sharp ring at the jangling hall bell.

Lady Meadowes, satisfied that she had borne to the fullest extent required of her the burthen of visits of condolence from the half-dozen near neighbours who had so long constituted themselves her friends, determined to resist the appeal. She had signified to each of them that they would show their kindness best by leaving her for the present alone with her daughter.

"I can see no one this evening, Nichols," said she faintly, "*No one*:—not even Mr. Henderson."

The old man hurried out to convey her prohibition. Already, the footman was parleying at the hall-door with a stranger. Not a gentleman; for he was loud, peremptory, and presuming.

"It was absolutely necessary that he should

have an interview with Lady Meadowes. He came on business. He came from a distance."

The country-footman was about to yield to the importunities of a man who, though his great-coat was of the roughest, spoke in the tone of one having authority, when Nichols arrived in all the dignity of his mourning and white hairs, to confirm the original negative.

"Business, or no business, it was quite impossible that her ladyship, who was infirm of health, as well as suffering from recent family affliction, could be disturbed at that hour."

"I come on the part of Sir Jervis Meadowes," rejoined the intruder, "I fancy you'll find it your best interest to admit me at once."

Nichols was startled. Instinctive deference towards the reigning representative of a family with which a service of half a century had connected him, rendered it difficult to persevere in opposition. This man, common-looking as he was, might be a messenger of peace and good-will from the head of the house. To

reject the olive-branch, might be an injury to those whom he would have died to serve or defend. Uttering a word of admonition therefore to Sting, who still maintained his post of guardianship of the door-mat, he invited the stranger to step in; and ushered him across the grim, low-browed old hall, into what, in that old-fashioned place, was called the eating-room: a spacious chamber, wainscoted and ceiled with carved oak; enlivened only by family portraits of baronets and dames of the Meadowes family; most of them curious specimens of exploded art; and about as graceful and life-like as the effigies of painted alabaster recumbent on their tombs in Radensford Church.

Still, such as they were, old Nichols regarded them almost with idolatry. And on perceiving that his companion did not show their goodly presence the respect of so much as removing his hat, he eyed the offender with such marked disgust and reproval, that involuntarily he marked his consciousness of infraction of the laws of good breeding.

"I will speak to Miss Meadowes, Sir; I will

apprise my young lady that you are here," said he, while the stranger somewhat sulkily removed his hat.—"What name shall I announce to her?"

"Mr. Chubbs Parkis—but my name will tell her nothing. Say I represent the heir-at-law of the late Sir Marcus Meadowes, Baronet."

Now Nichols could no more have pronounced the name of "the *late* Sir Marcus Meadowes" to his master's daughter, than have lifted the roof of Meadowes Court. The utmost he attempted was to whisper to Amy that she was wanted; and, when she reached the hall, to apprise her that a messenger awaited her on the part of Sir Jervis Meadowes.

Though little used to encounter strangers, poor Amy did not for a moment resist. The visit probably involved some trouble or ceremony from which she might spare her mother.—She advanced therefore with a timid step towards Mr. Chubbs Parkis, who was warming himself with an air of complacent self-possession on the hearth-rug, with his back towards the fire.—But the moment he caught sight of her slender

figure, looking slighter than ever in her deep mourning attire, and that childlike face, so pale and so gentle, his manner became subdued to decency. He took his hands from his pockets, and bowed respectfully.

"You wished to speak to me, Sir?" she inquired in those silvery tones that went to the heart of most people.

"On the contrary, Madam; I wished to speak to Lady Meadowes," replied the intruder, glancing reproachfully at Nichols, who had closed, but still stood beside the door, as if officiating as chamberlain for the protection of his young lady. "Your servant, yonder, denied me admittance to her."

"He did right. Mamma is a great invalid:—unequal to an interview with strangers,—unequal to the transaction of business."

"Business, however, Miss Meadowes, must be done; and I doubt you are less equal to answer the questions I am compelled by my duty to my employer, Sir Jervis Meadowes, to ask, than even her ladyship."

"Questions on business I am *wholly* in-

capable of answering," replied Miss Meadowes, gathering firmness as her companion resumed, though civilly, his tone of authority.—"And as I know that Sir Jervis Meadowes has already been in communication with my father's executors,—both of whom are in the country,—I must refer you to *them*, Sir, for any information you wish to obtain."

"Nevertheless," persisted Mr. Chubbs Parkis, "there are points on which a plain answer rendered by members of the family, might save worlds of trouble and litigation."

"Or might *produce* them," said Amy, with more self-possession than was to be expected.—"You must therefore excuse my entering into business discussions of any kind."

"This evasion, Madam, looks very far from satisfactory," retorted Chubbs, knitting his brows and begining to bully.—"I expected at least frankness from so young a lady."

Old Nichols now thought it time to interpose. "Miss Meadowes has signified, Sir, that she wishes the interview to be at end," said he. "Your gig is at the door. At this hour, you

will be sure to find the Rector or Dr. Burnaby, my late master's two executors, at home."

Under sanction of the butler's interference, Amy now effected a quiet retreat from the room; Old Nichols with a firm demeanour keeping back Mr. Chubbs Parkis till she had had time to regain the drawing-room. "If neither of them is to be found, Sir," continued the old man, while his baffled companion angrily resumed his hat, with more than one muttered oath, "the family solicitors are Preston and Son, of Cardington, with whom you may communicate at pleasure."

"Ten miles off, across the forest; — and I have already driven sixteen!" rejoined Parkis, angrily buttoning up his wrap-rascal as he strode across the hall.—"However,—there's one comfort, old gentleman,—you'll have to pay for your impudence.—*Your* time is 'most over, and ours is coming. Good night, old boy.—When next we meet, you and your young lady will have had to lower your flag by a peg or two."

Already, almost before the gig was out of

sight and hearing, the quakings of poor old Nichols appeared to justify the prediction. — Who was this strange messenger? — Why should Sir Jervis Meadowes communicate through such a medium with his kinsman's widow and daughter?—As to Amy, her self-possession had deserted her the moment she quitted the presence of one who addressed her in a tone of insolence to which she was so little accustomed; and when Nichols rejoined her in the corridor leading to the drawing-room, she was in tears.

She had called him softly to her to enjoin that nothing might be said to create uneasiness to her mother. Enough to inform his lady that a person had called on business whom he had referred to the lawyers.—Nothing could be simpler or more likely; nor was Lady Meadowes of a nature to inquire over-anxiously concerning any matter of pecuniary interest.

Poor Amy exerted herself more than usual that evening, to divert her mother's attention and prevent her recurring to the subject.—They talked together,—each trying to solace the other

by assumed cheerfulness,—of the works to be completed at Meadowes Court on the return of spring.—They talked together on many subjects; —*any*, but the one that hung so heavy on their hearts !—

CHAPTER X.

"COME and dine with me, to-day, at Richmond, like a good fellow, my dear Davenport," said Hamilton Drewe to his fellow-lodger, whom he was surprised and overjoyed to find still in London, early in the autumn, on his return from a cruise to the Channel Islands.

"Too late in the year," replied Marcus, as usual, busy at his easel.

"On the contrary. This bright September sun is warmer than July."

"Ay. But it don't last long enough to enable one, as in July, to boat or drive back pleasantly to town, after an overplus of Moselle-

cup. One should never dine by candlelight at Richmond and Greenwich; or by daylight, in town."

"You are so fastidious!—I want you to meet one or two chosen friends,—artists,—men of letters,—who don't belong to the Coventry."

"Take them to the Albion, then,—or the Blue Posts,—or the devil," was Davenport's churlish reply.

"But I particularly wish you to make their acquaintance; and unluckily, Richmond, which affords no temptation to *you*, was one to *them* when I made the invitation. The sight of a green tree is refreshing to poor unfortunate fellows who spend twelve months of the year with their noses in an inkstand, in this confounded smoky town."

"That is your mistake. London, in September and October, when all the blockheads of the earth have guns on their shoulders, or spy-glasses in their hands, is neither smoky nor confounded.—On the whole, I think there is less noise here, just now, than on the moors."

Poor Drewe, perceiving that his friend was in

one of his contradictory moods, thought it better to let him exhaust his bitter vein, as the shortest mode of obtaining final acquiescence.

"You asked me, yesterday," resumed Marcus, "what tempted me to remain in London at this empty season; and as you do not often listen to answers, I replied by a shrug, which I left you to interpret. But if you really care to know the reason why I prefer Babylon deserted, to Babylon swarming, it is because, in the autumn, one is safer from idle intrusion. People who remain in town when Grosvenor Square and the Opera are closed for the season, are mostly persons having a purpose and occupation in life. The atmosphere, too, is now nearly as clear as in the fens or the Highlands. —I have seen a hand's breadth of blue sky several times, lately.—Cocotte's complexion is, as you may perceive, some degrees less like a chimney-sweeper's than when you last saw her smoothing her ruffled plumes."

"Still, I don't see why, because you find London more countrified than the country, you should be less sociable than in the dog-days,"

pleaded Drewe, not unreasonably. "You can have no engagement, for there is not a soul in town."

"I never *am* engaged to those whom *you* call souls. The chum whom I am sworn never to throw over is one Marcus Davenport, who loves to vagabondise in his own time and place. I don't care to leave my palette, as long as there is a clear sky. When the last gleam of sunshine departs, I follow it, staff in hand; dine at the Travellers on the joint and a pint of pale-ale; and then, at half-price, to the play."

The looks of Hamilton Drewe would have betrayed some disgust at these plebeian arrangements, had he not stood in awe of the raillery of his outspoken friend.

"Well, take your staff, as usual; and instead of dining at the Travellers join us, where you will. My friends must give up Richmond, since you have taken the Star and Garter *en grippe*. —You shall have your pale-ale and mutton elsewhere."

"In order that you and your friends may wish me at some unpleasant remote locality, all

dinner-time?—No, no!—Why can't you let me alone?—I am really not worth your trouble, or worthy your hospitality."

"*That* point, allow me to determine. *I* consider you cheap at the money," said Drewe, laughing. "I have a foreign friend, whom I picked up touring in the Channel Islands, a sunny-hearted fellow, whom I am sure you will not dislike: and a literary man,—not first chop, I admit:—a man without a name,—a sturdy labourer in the vineyard,—who embraces the calling as it is rarely embraced in England, and always in France,—as a profession,—as a *trade* if you will; a practical man, who rears his offspring upon printer's ink."

"Pho, pho, my dear Drewe. Such men there be,—'more power to their elbow,' as say our Dublin brothers-in-law. But *such* men dine not at Richmond with dilettante dandies."

"Pretty nearly what Hargood himself said to me, when I invited him.—However, I promised him green grass (just as I should have guaranteed an alderman green fat), and secured my man."

"I hope you did not tell this person I was coming?"

"I never mentioned your name. If I had, he would have been little the wiser. For he knows no more of the great world than I of the Thugs; and among literary people the *paraphe* of Marcus D., you know, goes for nothing."

Albeit Davenport was perfectly aware of the fact, the remark piqued him.—Of the many worlds of which English society is composed, the literary one was perhaps the one that interested him most. Probably as *terra incognita* to him; the same reason which rendered hisown aristocratic sphere a matter of curiosity to Grub Street.

Though he still persisted in insulting Hamilton Drewe, by assuring him that his foreign *protégé* was probably some *chevalier d'industrie*, getting up a tour with views of English society studied in a boarding-house at "Volvich," and his professional man of letters a hack, who would testify his value of the autograph of Drewe by getting it inscribed on the back of a bill, he agreed to join them at Richmond;

and, in fact, arrived at the Hotel some hours before them, in order to enjoy a row up the river to Hampton Court, and a glimpse of the pictures; by way of atonement to himself for dining with so slight a thing as Hamilton Drewe.

The consequence of this expedition was that, by the time he returned to Richmond, "Mr. Drewe's party" was already at table; having made considerable progress in the early dinner for which they had conditioned, and reached a second course consisting of the inevitable unctuous duck and green peas, and limp jelly tasting of bergamot; strengthened by the local dainty called Maids of Honour which, in the days of King William of glorious and immortal memory constituted a *friandise* of our Anglo-Batavian or Bœotian Court.

When ushered into the little parlour nearest the river, which, so much resembles a canary's breeding-box lined with moss and wool, Marcus Davenport, albeit unused to the apologetic mood, thought it necessary to mutter a few words of excuse for his unceremonious costume, —which was that of a gallant young waterman

fresh from the oar, and scarcely fit to encounter the scrutiny of Monsieur le Vicomte de Grugemonde, who was in full dinner-dress,—undergoing the slow torture of a stiff white choker, and a new pair of varnished boots.

It was not however to *him*, with his little semi-bearded kid's face, and *jeune premier* costume, that Davenport addressed his apologies.—There was a plain, stern, hard-featured man seated at the right hand of Hamilton Drewe, whose deliberate scrutiny, on his free-and-easy entrance into the room, somewhat abashed him.—To each, however, he directed one of those awkward nods which a shy Englishman calls a bow; in return for an equally awkward muttering of names on the part of their host, such as a shy Englishman calls an introduction.

In order to fill up the pause which is apt to follow the entrance of a stranger, Hamilton Drewe endeavoured to resume the *mauvaises plaisanteries* by which he had been previously endeavouring to draw out his guest, the Vicomte.

Gentle dulness ever loves a joke; and some people find it difficult to manufacture one, unless by social persecution: to chaff a friend,—or embarrass a butt,—being one of the exquisite tilting-matches of modern chivalry.

"And so my dear Grugemonde," said he, "you were with Méry in those fashionable promenades in London, in which he describes himself as drinking 'hafnaf à Ship-Taverne,'—and talks of the hotel yonder as 'l'Hôtel de l'Eglise et de la Jarretière,' translating it, for his less erudite countrymen; as '*Stard* and Garter!'"

"I was with him in several very pleasant excursions," replied the Viscount in excellent English. "I know not how he describes them in print. *Le nom ne fait rien à la chose:* or, as your great poet phrased it—'What's in a name?'"

Charmed by the good-humoured manner in which the young foreigner parried an ill-bred attack, Davenport immediately challenged him —Anglo-Saxon-wise—to a glass of champagne. The stern Hargood, without relaxing a tittle of

his scowl, testified his satisfaction in a more logical manner.

"We ought to forgive, in Monsieur Méry," said he, "a few verbal blunders;—*we* more especially,—who seldom write or speak six works of a foreign language without a solecism. If he had even clipped the Queen's English as we are in the habit of murdering the Citizen King's French, the crime would be amply redeemed by a single sentence of his, *à-propos* to the residence of the Orleans family on this very spot: '*je ne suis point étonné que l'homme qui désespère choisisse Richmond pour sa résidence. Il voit toujours devant ses yeux couler l'espérance en action. Rien ne console comme ce filet d'eau qui se débat contre un brin d'herbe; et qui, le ciel aidant, se gonfle un peu plus loin, coupe une capitale en deux, emporte des flottes, et fait alliance avec la mer.*'"

The accent with which Hargood delivered his quotation was as *un*-Parisian as if acquired in "Stratford school by Bowe," or at Eton, or Harrow, or the Groves of Academe, or the

Groves of Blarney.—But the young Frenchman was not the less deeply touched. *He* heard nothing in the citation but the perfect appreciation of its truth which had caused it to be committed to memory by an English man of letters.

"I am rejoiced, Sir," said he, "to know that our nations are beginning mutually to treat each other with greater liberality. This arises probably from the extension of our travels. Facilities of locomotion,—railroads,—steam navigation,—convey us to the remotest parts of the earth. We visit not only Germany, Russia, Italy, but the East and West,—both India and America; and, familiarized by the strangenesses and savagery of remote lands, the Englishman becomes more merciful to the peculiarities of his nearest neighbour across the Channel; and the Frenchman less prone to believe that his own habits give the law to the world."

"We have certainly been a trifle liberalised by intercommunication," said Hargood. "English enterprise has served to depreciate the import-

ance of that goose-down chimera called English comfort. Colonisation is the real schoolmaster abroad, to teach useful knowledge to John Bull: and we have derived other valuables besides nuggets from Australia and New Zealand."

"Let us drink to the Extirpation of National Prejudice," cried Hamilton Drewe, who felt perhaps that his position as host was the only one he could maintain to advantage.

"I will drink to anything and everything else you please," retorted Davenport, filling his glass. "The wine is not particularly good; but the sentiment far worse. I speak both as man and artist. Extinguish national prejudice, and nationality will follow; and with it, all local colouring. The absurd introduction of the fez into Turkey and bonnet into Spain, has stripped those countries of half their individuality. The climate has not changed with the lapse of centuries; why should the costume?"

"Why, indeed," rejoined Grugemonde; "except that, as we have been released from hauberks and coats of mail by the invention of gunpowder, and from perpetual woollen by the

invention of register-stoves, I see no reason why we should accoutre ourselves like the good King Dagobert, or Queen Bertha of distaff celebrity."

"Some sayer of clever spitefulnesses,—who was it?—Horace Walpole, I think—used to say, that he hoped he might die before Capability Brown; as he should like to see the Kingdom of Heaven before *he* began to improve it," observed Captain Davenport. "I certainly rejoice that I saw India before it was stripped of its picturesque shawls and filmy draperies. The first steamboat on the Ganges, indeed, had even then left a desecrating trace; and lawn-sleeves effected their worst to destroy the fervid impulses of Brahminical idolatry. Still, the foot of Dr. Hooker had set no mark on the Himalaya; or the varnished boots of our aristocratic sportsmen, in the Cingalese jungles.—I am grateful for having viewed the face of Oriental nature, pure and undefiled."

"Without a daub of rouge, or a rag of Brussels lace!" added the Frenchman, jocosely.

"I quite agree with you, my dear Daven-

port," interposed Drewe, who was growing a little muzzy. "Give me the highest perfection of art, or the mildest and purest aspect of nature: no medium, Sir,—no medium!"

"If such be your election, Drewe, you are far from agreeing with me," rejoined Davenport,—who was prepared to go any distance out of his way to avoid coinciding with so flimsy a philosopher. "The purest nature, if you will. But if by the highest perfection of art you mean, as I believe you do, the most polished surface of fashionable society, in London, Paris, or any other capital, I enter my protest. Dissentient because there is no analogy between my nature and theirs. I was not born for such an order of society."

"Not *born* for it?" reiterated Drewe, who was rather proud of the Honourable prefixed to the patronymic of his friend.

"Not born for it," calmly repeated Davenport. "There is a Newmarket for men, as for beasts. My family have belonged for some generations to the class of barn-door nobility,—

ennobled squires,—without a notion or an ambition beyond their kennel and park paling. Nor, (if you will permit me to resume where you interrupted me,) was I ever trained to it. The impulses of my temperament were not subdued in early youth to caper in a lady's chamber. My hours and inclinations are not those of the fine world; and I don't value the fine world enough to change them. I can't live among folks who talk only of the stable or the kitchen—"

"Hardly a fair definition of the sportsman, and the gastronome!" said Drewe, beginning to be alarmed lest Monsieur le Vicomte, a member of the Jockey Club and the *Moutards*, might suspect his new acquaintance of being a snob.

"I detest *la cuisine fine;* and to French wines, prefer pale ale," continued Davenport, seeing his drift. "An over-lighted room gives me the head-ache. In short, I prefer society in which my intellects, senses, and limbs, are wholly unshackled."

"You would have been happiest, then, in times

When wild in woods the noble savage ran?"

said Hargood, amused by his seemingly unconscious egotism.

"Happier than among fine ladies and gentlemen; because more on a par with my companions. But I can imagine a medium state of society, highly agreeable. I have enjoyed it in my time—I hope to enjoy it again. I will not say that I am enjoying it now; lest my friend Drewe, who usually mistakes me, should suspect me of toadyism. But surely it is time for coffee and cigars? or we shall be running our heads into the small hours without so much as having heard the chimes at midnight."

As the night was dry, and brightened almost into warmth by a full September moon,—the vintage moon of France, so apt to determine fine weather,—the quartette repaired to the garden to smoke; where, in the course of their lounge, the ice melted so speedily between Davenport and Hargood that when the

moment arrived for returning to town, it was agreed that they should charter the same Hansom. Congeniality of feeling and opinion soon ripened into acquaintance; and as much pleasant talk ensued as, before they reached Hyde Park Corner, might have been condensed into a striking article for the oldest number of Blackwood or newest of Fraser. — Ere they parted, their addresses had been mutually exchanged. Neither thought it necessary to apologise for not inviting the other to a palace:—for both were men of plain sense and simple dealing.

Edward Hargood, however, had by twenty years the advantage or disadvantage of his new friend. His nature was more crabbed, his clay was harder set: nor was his severe philosophy mitigated by that innate love of the beautiful, which Hamilton Drewe called æsthetic, and his brother-officers had been wont to call bosh.

Even Davenport was struck, at his first visit, by the bareness and squareness of the domicile of his new acquaintance: a first-floor over an upholsterer's, in one of those streets of Soho now occupied by pianoforte or soda-water manu-

facturers, or other seekers after space: attesting by their liberality of proportion the correctness of Macaulay's statement, that this quarter of the town was long the favourite resort of wealth and fashion.—A roomy staircase, of which the inlaid floor proved its date to be prior to the invention of stair-carpets, ascended by low, well-graduated steps to a lobby wide enough to contain one of the mouse-trap mansions of the purlieus of Hyde Park; from which opened the spacious, comfortless apartments of the drudge of letters.

The meagre spider-legged furniture was probably coeval with the house: — a ponderous writing-table covered with discoloured black leather, being the only modern appurtenance.— But although this and every other spot in the room where books or papers could be laid was loaded with unbound volumes, in boards or cloth, the strictest order and cleanliness prevailed.—Nothing of the dust and confusion of a lawyer's office. The hearth was neatly swept. The frames of two hideous pictures, the only ornament of those desolate walls, were encased

in muslin; and the faces of the portraits they contained,—a cross-looking clergyman in gown and bands, and a desponding, middle-aged lady well deserving to be his partner for life,—might have been subdued into a pleasanter aspect by the decorous orderliness over which they presided.

Hamilton Drewe had incidentally informed Davenport that Hargood was a widower.

"He must have daughters, though; or probably, a maiden sister," was the reflection of Marcus. "None but a woman ever tyrannises sufficiently in a household, to produce such neatness as this."

There was something dispiriting, however, in so much preciseness. — Though scarcely five minutes elapsed before Hargood, in a grey camlet wrapper, made his appearance from an inner room, Davenport had found leisure to fancy himself in a Moravian settlement.

"I am glad you have not forgotten your promise," said his host; "and still more so that you have so timed your visit as to enable me to receive you. Saturday is my holiday;

and this morning, my week's work was done and sent off. To-morrow, I devote to reading; —often the heavier work of the two."

Davenport was about to remark on the pleasant facility of "skip,"—of turning over a dull page, or laying a heavy volume on the shelf. But by a peculiar glance directed by Hargood towards a pile of works, evidently fresh from the press and guiltless of the intervention of a circulating or "select" library, he inferred, and justly, that the reading of Hargood was professional; the reading of the critic, not of the book-worm, or book-butterfly. — Himself the slave of his wilful will, he could readily imagine that *such* reading must be hard labour without extenuating circumstances.—He began to understand the value of the dull and grave monotonous room, interposing no extraneous temptations between a book and the reader on compulsion.

"We had a pleasant dinner the other night at Richmond," resumed Hargood; "pleasanter than I ever expected to enjoy in the company of young Drewe:—an amiable, well-intentioned

young fellow, who has grievously mistaken his vocation."

"I'm afraid so,—I'm sadly afraid so."

"These are not times," resumed Hargood, "for what used to be called 'a young gentleman with a pretty taste for poetry,' to be written up into notice by partial critics.—Good poetry,—strong prose,—will always find readers: but education for the million has placed the parts of speech at too low a premium, for a moderate use of them, if addressed to the public, to be regarded otherwise than an impertinence.—I have known the elder Drewe these dozen years past, as an old donkey browsing on the wastes of Science. Through him I became acquainted with his ward: to whom I wish humbler ambitions than inflate his empty head: for his heart is in the right place."

Davenport could not help wondering whether his own intellectual pretensions were as coolly and impartially weighed in Hargood's balance, as those of his friend.

"Hamilton Drewe is independent in means and position," was all he hazarded in reply.

"It is something that, under such advantages or disadvantages, he should prefer Paternoster to Rotten Row, and the Athenæum to the Coventry."

"I don't agree with you, Mr. Davenport," replied Hargood, with his most knock-me-down air. "He who is not with us, is against us.—Young Drewe's soul is at the Coventry. Let his body go and keep it company. He has adopted literature simply as a means of notoriety, without any real sympathy for the cause of letters; and it is these maudlin poets who, after too copiously imbibing the water, or rather milk-and-water, of Helicon, sicken the public with their drivelling; and beget a belief that the age for poetry is past.—It is *not* past, Sir. The world has a right to become more fastidious as it attains riper years: and it will not accept mica for gold."

"I have no great fault to find with my elegiac friend," replied Davenport, who, when bow-wowed, was apt to bark again.—"He is a good-natured, easy, unmeaning fellow,—not near so great an impostor as the learned Pundit his

relation. But even old Wroughton has his use in the world. His fussy officiousness is invaluable in vivifying those thousand moribund societies and institutions ending in 'logical,' which, like a boa-constrictor, seem to subsist on a monthly meal; and afterwards lie torpid."

"Yes,—I believe the old gentleman has his use," replied Hargood. "But I own I look on such people as interlopers. It is perhaps because, a compulsory labourer in the vineyard, and following literature as a calling, I feel a little jealous of the idlers who come plucking off the half-ripe grapes, and spoiling my market. My gorge rises against amateurs:—amateur actors, always more stagey than the stage;—amateur dramatists, who steal the stolen goods of our translators;—amateur painters, who—"

"Come, come, come!" interrupted Davenport. "If Drewe have failed to apprise you of my usurped vocation, know me as one of the race you are about to denounce.—*I* am an amateur artist."

"I ought to have guessed it, from your preferring the other day, Vandyck and Lely

to turtle and lobster cutlets!—But again I find my vineyard trenched upon. I have a daughter who is an artist,—a professional artist.—Stay," said he, rising and opening the door through which he had made his entrance, "you shall give me your opinion of her talents. Mary!—I am bringing a gentleman into your studio," he continued, ushering Mark Davenport into a chamber still more spacious than the sitting-room; in which the concentrated light fell full upon an easel at which a young girl was working. She scarcely raised her eyes, and not at all her voice, as they entered.—Her dress, an artist's grey blouse of the simplest form and meanest material, imparted little charm to her somewhat insignificant figure; and when, struck by the masterly execution of her work, Davenport found it impossible to repress an exclamation of surprise and admiration, she slowly turned upon him a pair of wondering dark eyes; as if the voice of praise was to her an unknown tongue.

Nothing could be more subdued than her air. Her cheek was colourless. Her lips smile-

less. Mary Hargood was evidently a household victim. Davenport had been impressed at the Richmond dinner by the contemptuous and arbitrary tone in which Hargood spoke of the weaker sex. The fruits were before him. This calm sad-looking little girl of eighteen, in her grey gown, who was painting as men rarely and women never paint at eight-and-thirty, evidently knew not the meaning of a will of her own.

The work on which Mary Hargood was occupied, was a copy of Murillo's "Assumption of the Virgin," which the painter himself recopied so often, though not half often enough for the requirements of posterity; and while Marcus looked over her shoulder with unceasing wonder and delight, he could hardly sufficiently admire the vigour of her touch,—the correctness of her eye.

"Your copy, Miss Hargood," said he, "nearly equals the original!"

"Have you ever seen the original, that you can utter so gross a piece of flattery?" she quietly replied, without lifting her eyes from the canvas.

"I have seen the picture at the Louvre, and the smaller one at Lansdowne House. But I alluded to the one you are copying."

"Not very difficult for her to equal, for it is her own," interposed her father, abruptly. "It is the first copy after Murillo she executed; at the British Institution, where it won the second prize. We sold it for fifteen guineas,—a handsome price. The dealer who purchased it soon obtained an order for a second copy. But Mary has no longer the original to work from; and feels that it will be inferior to the first. For *this* therefore she intends only to ask twelve guineas."

"It is worth ten times, twenty times the money!" replied Davenport with enthusiasm. But it grated a little upon his ear to hear the buying and selling of the young artist's works so crudely alluded to in her presence. She did not join, indeed, in the conversation; but went calmly painting on, as if accustomed to be treated as a nonentity.

"Have you anything else to show this gentleman?" inquired her father, in a tone of

severe authority, which Davenport feared would produce a peevish negative. Instead of which, she quietly laid aside her palette, and fetched a portfolio.

"Nothing but sketches," said she, placing the book on a chair for her visitor's inspection, and instantly resuming her work.

"We will take it with us into the other room to glance over the drawings," said her father to Marcus, placing it under his arm, and carrying it and his reluctant guest off together. "We should interrupt her by staying here; and Mary cannot afford to be idle. I was reading to her when you came in. But that is no interruption. She is used to it. Mary has received most of her lessons from me while occupied at her easel."

"A heavy pull upon the faculties," observed Davenport, as Hargood drew after him the heavy black door of the studio.—"Are you not afraid, my dear Sir, of overtaxing her fine genius?"

"Fine *what?*" cried Hargood, almost with indignation. "You don't call it a proof of

genius, I hope, to make a tolerable copy of one of Murillo's pictures?"

"I call *this* a proof of genius," replied his visitor, holding at arm's length an exquisite landscape in water-colours, which Hargood had taken from the portfolio and placed in his hand. "The composition is exquisite; the aerial perspective, by Jove, as fine as Turner's!"

"If it were, it would be worth hundreds of pounds," was the cold calculating rejoinder. "And for the best of Mary's drawings, I have never been able to get more than a couple of guineas."

Again, Davenport felt disgusted. Still more so when, by a closer survey of the portfolio, he saw he was dealing with an artist as imaginative in design as superior in the mere mechanism of her art.

"How hard she must have worked to have attained, at so early an age, such perfection!" murmured he, musing aloud.

"Hard, indeed!—But Mary has had great advantages.—Turner, Constable, Etty, all of them my friends, overlooked her early progress.

She exhibited, indeed, an almost equal talent for music. But the career of a public performer, Captain Davenport, is far from desirable; so *that* pretension I nipped in the bud; and should she be lucky in the first work she exhibits, my daughter will probably realise nearly as much money as an artist. Angelica Kaufmann made a rapid fortune."

"I should much like, if you would permit me," said Davenport, "to express to Miss Hargood before I go the delight which these exquisite works of hers have afforded me."

"Better let it alone. The fewer compliments the better!" said the matter-of-fact father, tying the ferret strings of the shabby portfolio with as much indifference as he would have corded a portmanteau. "Mary is a good girl, and must not be spoiled.—For the last five years, ever since her mother's death, she has been working as hard as I have, to provide the means of giving her young brothers a solid classical education. I do not want her to be disturbed by flattery, or her time wasted by idle visitors."

Davenport felt that it would be a relief to his feelings to take one of the quarto volumes of Johnson's Dictionary from the table, and discharge it at the head of this dry mercenary father, as the great lexicographer did at the head of a shabby bookseller.

"My friend Drewe did not apprise me, Mr. Hargood, that you were so fortunate in the talents of your family," said he gravely, having overmastered the impulse.

"How should he?—He knows not that I have a child belonging to me!—Had I informed a rich man like young Drewe that my daughter was painting for the benefit of her family, he would have thought it necessary to give her an order; besides perhaps besetting the girl with the compliments you were preparing just now. *You* are in a different position. You have given me grounds to surmise that you are a poor man; and by your own accomplishments, are capable of appreciating her merits, without forcing yourself on us as a patron."

"Nevertheless, if you would permit me," stammered out Davenport,—though little sub-

ject to shyness, "and if Miss Hargood were willing to re-copy a second time the picture on which she is engaged, I should be overjoyed to pay for it double the price given by her present employer."

"I will speak to her about it," replied Hargood, coldly. "At all events, I should not permit you to pay more than the market-price; unless, on delivery, superior execution warranted an advance."

"I confess," said Davenport, seeking to prolong his visit, in some hope that the large black door might again revolve on its hinges,—"I confess to a weakness in favour of Murillo. I prefer his Holy Families to those of any other painter."

"To even Raphael's?"

"Even Raphael's. To me, the Virgins of the Italian artist are too spiritual; and as opposite to the maidens of Galilee (whom I have studied, Mr. Hargood, face to face,) as if the models which sat for them had been Finmarkers."

"We are not bound to imagine that Mary

of Galilee resembled any other daughter of the land. For *my* part, nothing surprises me more than the audacity of the artist who first endeavoured to paint a Holy Family;—unless, indeed, it were the inspired St. Luke. As a lover of painting, I have a strong general objection to Scripture subjects."

"Yet you will hardly deny that the arts have done nearly as much as the pulpit, towards the diffusion of Christianity?"

"And not a little to its detriment.—Nay, I am not sure that the enormous spread of Mohammedanism is not partly attributable to its proscription of all representation of the human face, and consequently to the absence of all physical representation of the divinity. Your favourite Murillo, for instance, who copied *his* Marys from the water-carriers of Madrid—"

"The very origin of their truthfulness!" interrupted Davenport. "The human touch, the working of the muscles of the heart pourtrayed in their faces, is wholly wanting in those fair ineffable simperers of Raphael.—Nothing inter-

ests,—nothing searches the heart like the Real. This book," continued, Davenport, snatching up a volume of Jane Eyre, which had recently appeared and was lying under critical sentence upon Hargood's reading-desk,—" this book, by which I have been lately enthralled, is in my opinion the most remarkable specimen of autobiography published since the most shameless but most forcible of all works of the kind—Rousseau's Confessions. And why?—because it is the daguerreotyped picture of a human heart, in all its strength and all its weakness."

" I am glad you like the book; for I have marked it down for especial praise," replied Hargood. —" For me, it possesses a peculiar and melancholy interest, as the History of a Governess;—a class with which my own life has been miserably connected. But now, my dear Sir, I must send you away; or Mary will slacken over her labour, poor girl, if I do not return to cheer her up with a chapter or two of the Vestiges of Creation."

Davenport took a reluctant leave. He fancied that his conversation might have supplied for pleasanter topics to lighten the professional labours of poor Mary Hargood.

CHAPTER XI.

"I'm sure, my dear Doctor, I don't know how we shall ever break it to her," was the closing remark of good, gruff old Burnaby to Mr. Henderson after a long discussion between them of some unpleasant tidings communicated by Messrs. Preston of Cardington, relative to the Meadowes estate. "One can't leave such a task to the lawyers. Their hateful technicalities would confuse her mind.—One or other of us must tell her the plain truth, in the simplest manner. But by Jove! I've hardly courage to take this disagreeable business on myself."

"There is no need, my dear Doctor," replied

the Rector mildly. "The undertaking does not alarm me. The scenes of grief and anxiety we have witnessed this autumn, have rather hardened my heart towards mere mercenary distresses. As to Lady Meadowes, I know no woman on earth more thoroughly disinterested."

"Disinterested, as it is easy to be, and as all women fancy themselves, in despising imaginary millions, and supposititious diamond coronets! —After that fashion, you or I might disdain the throne of Spain, or the wealth of the Indies. But faith, when it comes to a question of bread and butter,—when it comes to being turned out of the house where you have lived happily for the last thirty years—"

"But the ejectment is not yet certain," pleaded Mr. Henderson, in a reprehensive tone.

"I don't know what you'd have!—Our friends the Prestons strongly advise our not bringing the business to trial. They have taken the best legal opinions. Three leading conveyancers have decided that the objection to Sir Mark's disposal of the property, is fatal. Those fine

and recovery questions, to us a mystery, are points clearly laid down by the law of the land: and the only wonder is, how Sir Mark Meadowes and his father before him, to both of whom the custom of Radensford Manor must have been perfectly familiar, allowed themselves to neglect it. As to Sir Mark, there's no forgiveness for *him*,—with a daughter—and such a daughter,—unprovided for."

"There is no forgiveness for his having squandered away the six thousand a-year which he originally inherited. As to this unfortunate forfeiture of the Meadowes Court estate to the heir-at-law, the family attorneys, whoever they were at the time, are solely to blame. In matters of business, Sir Mark was a mere child."

"At fifty-nine, no man has a right to remain a child in matters of business. It is culpable, Sir,—it is heinous."

"In the eyes of my cloth, my dear Doctor," rejoined the Rector, "there are many less pardonable transgressions."

"But all this don't help us towards our ex-

planation with the poor dear lady," cried Dr. Burnaby. "Would you have me pave me the way, pray, by a hint or two to Miss Amy; or will you at once blurt it out to her mother?"

"I will explain it, with proper caution to her mother. But I am mistaken if I do not find Lady Meadowes rise at once to the level of her position."

"*Fall* at once, you mean."

"Fall, if you will. But such a trial, nobly encountered, is, in my opinion, a step upward,—a step leading to the skies."

"I'm glad you see it in *any* favourable light. I could be content to spare them such an advantage," said the more worldly-minded old doctor. "Four hundred a-year for the support of two delicate helpless creatures, accustomed to all the luxuries of life—"

"To all its comforts,—not to all its luxuries," pleaded the Rector. "And reflect how great a blessing it is that they *have* four hundred a-year! Unless the careless man, whom you admit was a child in matters of business, had charged the

estate on his marriage with his wife's dowry, they would have been absolutely penniless. The stock and furniture at Meadowes Court will not sell for £1,200; and that miserable pittance might have been their all!"

"You are right, my dear friend, as you usually are, and as most people are who look to the sunny side of things," replied Dr. Burnaby. "May you be able to satisfy this poor widow as readily as you have silenced me. And now, with your leave, while you make the plunge, I'll drive on to the Manor House, and let Lady Harriet know how matters stand. She will be of service to us in helping to temper the wind to these shorn lambs."

The Rector of Radensford who, though he made the best of an irretrievable grievance, was deeply troubled by the darkened prospects of Amy and her mother, experienced some reluctance at the idea of their misfortune becoming so soon a matter of notoriety in the neighbourhood. But it could not be helped. Sir Jervis Meadowes showed every intention of

bringing matters to a speedy crisis. Perhaps it was as well that the ice should be broken at once.

Little however did he surmise,—little did even the kind-hearted bustling Dr. Burnaby imagine when he drove up to the door of the Manor House, how extensive a castle in the air his visit was fated to bring down.

From the period of her hospitable housing of the Meadowes family, three months before, poor Lady Harriet had led an unquiet life. With all her reliance on her own infallibility, she had been at times almost puzzled; with all her confidence in the superiority of principle innate in herself and her family, she had been more than once inclined to self-condemnation.

The heart of her nephew, London-man and callous as he appeared, had been wounded to the quick by the afflictions of the Meadowes family; aggravated by a conviction that he had been the means of conveying the fatal infection to the good old baronet: and he resigned himself by degrees, but without much of a struggle, to the passion which had in fact originated his ill-fated visit to Meadowes Court. Towards

Amy, happy, laughing, prosperous, and a trifle contemptuous, he might have maintained his dignified reserve. But the interest she had evinced in his indisposition, as well as her subsequent sorrows, and patience under suffering, had impelled him to throw off at once his ungracious armour of defence. On his sick-bed, and scarcely yet redeemed from the shadow of death, he not only admitted to himself that, if he recovered, Amy Meadowes would be the wife of his choice and wife of his heart, but made no secret of it to his aunt. Even Lady Harriet had been sufficiently dismounted from her pedestal of pride by so close an encounter with the grisly enemy who makes small distinction between ennobled clay and plebeian, that she refrained from indulging in the sermons and prohibitions by which she had endeavoured to forestal the evil.

"I will do all I can for you, my dear boy," said she, when her nephew's now nerveless hand enfolded her own, while endeavouring to secure her good offices in his favour. "But I give you little hope, William,—I have often heard

your father and mother applaud the firmness of the Davenports in discountenancing their brother's *mésalliance;* and I am convinced neither Sir Henry nor my sister would ever give their consent to your marriage with the daughter of a governess."

"A woman derives her position in life from her father, dear aunt, not from her mother."

"She derives her nature and instincts from both. I confess that, equally with your parents, I dread and detest the influence of ignoble blood. —Well! don't take away your hand, Willy. You have retained me as your advocate: and, as I said before, I will do my best."

"No one does their best, Aunt Harriet, where their own opinions or prejudices are adverse. But when will you write?—When will you endeavour to sound my mother about the best mode of attacking my father?"

"No hurry, my dear child.—You are as yet scarcely able to sit up. Besides, Amy, in her present deep affliction, is no object for courtship.—It would be an offence both to her and her mother even to hint at such a thing.—Get

well,—get strong, Willy. Let us endeavour to recover some degree of calmness after all the shocks we have undergone: and rely upon it, I will lose no time in opening a way for what I fear you will find a stormy discussion."

The moment for such a disclosure was, however, more favourable than was dreamed of in her ladyship's philosophy. The Eustaces, male and female, were in a mood unusually humane. They were both grateful to Providence, and ashamed of themselves: thankful that their only son had been spared to them; ashamed that they should have risked the lives of others by despatching him from the midst of infection, to Radensford Manor; and at the announcement of his danger, have hesitated about hurrying to his bedside.—When, therefore, Lady Harriet eventually announced that he was about to return home still enfeebled by his terrible malady, and dispirited by having to communicate to them a circumstance,—an attachment,—little likely to meet with their approbation, they prepared themselves to meet the worst with patience.—At all events, they would not endanger the con-

valescence of the invalid by premature opposition to his wishes.

When he made his appearance at last, wan, wasted, nervous, these good intentions were confirmed. There were tears in his mother's eyes; and never had Sir Henry been so near the verge of an emotion, as when his son re-entered the hall of his forefathers, instead of being conveyed, as at one time they apprehended, to the family vault. — Even Mr. Eustace himself was sufficiently satisfied of their kindly feelings towards him, to postpone till the morrow tidings likely to ruffle their good understanding.

Before the flowing lava of parental tenderness had found time to harden, a letter from the Manor House accomplished Lady Harriet's promise to her nephew, that she would do her best as his advocate. By apprising the Eustaces that at the death of her mother, Amy would come into an unincumbered estate of two-and-twenty hundreds a-year, she removed from their minds all superfluous scruples. Sir Henry thought it necessary, indeed, for the sake of consistency, to accompany his pompous "assent to his intended

proposals to the daughter of the late Sir Mark Meadowes," with a declaration that he ought to have done better; that, for the last three generations, the Eustaces had intermarried with the peerage, so that they had not a single low connection or objectionable relative; whereas there was no surmising to what humiliation they might not hereafter be exposed by such a blot on their scutcheon as the origin of the present Lady Meadowes. But he by no means forbad the match. He even promised to make suitable settlements; and to talk over with his man of business the proper amount of jointure and pin-money.

The heart of the young lover leapt within him at the sound. Never in his life had he been so moved, except when, after a two hours' homily, his father agreed to settle his book on his first Derby: and never, even then, had he been half so fervent or half so sincere in expressions of gratitude.—He longed to rush back into Gloucestershire that very day; and place his heart and hand at the feet of the good and precious being whom he accused himself of

having presumed to slight and depreciate. It was only because aware that the gates of Meadowes Court were closed against intrusion by the sacredness of family affliction, that he contented himself with pouring out his hopes and feelings in a letter more voluminous than judicious, which he forthwith despatched to Lady Harriet, to be placed in the hands of poor Amy at the first favourable moment.

"Of course, my dearest sister," wrote Lady Louisa, by the same post, "we are not a little grieved and disappointed. We had expected that a young man, circumstanced like William, would form an unexceptionable match. But God's will be done!—It might have been worse. —The conduct of Lady Meadowes in married life has been such as in some measure to efface the stigma of her origin; and as Sir Henry has generously sacrificed his feelings on this grievous occasion, and consented to a step on which his son has unfortunately set his heart, lose no time, dearest Harriet, in bringing the disagreeable affair to an issue. Till it is settled, William will recover neither his strength nor his looks;

and I do not wish the cause of his low spirits to be discussed in the school-room. The girls must not be allowed to surmise the unpleasant drawback attaching to their future sister-in-law. They must know nothing about the marriage till it is on the eve of solemnization."

After perusing this epistle, Lady Harriet gravely shook her head. Though she had fulfilled her promise to her nephew, it was in the belief that his parents would be inexorable; nor did she approve so complete an abnegation of principle on the part of the Eustaces.—What would the world say?—How would their inconsistency be judged by the merciless severity of public opinion?

Meanwhile, like most weak-minded people entrusted with a negotiation, she was in no hurry to bring it to a close.—It was not often she had so grand a secret in her keeping; and unusually stately was her demeanour when Mary Tremenheere dropped in at luncheon time, wondering, as usual, "how their poor dear friends at Meadowes Court were getting on, or whether they would ever hold up their heads again;" and

felt that her ample pocket contained credentials, likely, at no distant time, to raise those depressed heads and make their hearts sing for joy.

For two long days did she revolve in her mind the best mode of breaking the happy intelligence to Amy and her mother: and on the third, rose earlier than usual to indite a few lines, somewhat too grandiloquent for the occasion, begging "leave to wait upon Lady Meadowes at two o'clock that day, to communicate something of the highest importance; something which she trusted would prove as agreeable to her friends at Meadowes Court as to herself;" and, having sealed the letter with her largest and best emblazoned lozenge, and despatched it by her little foot-page in the form of Bill the weeding-boy, she was reclining back in her chair, meditating on the terms suitable to convey her nephew's proposals to her invalid neighbour, without marking too great a condescension on the part of the Eustaces or too unchristianly a sense of the sacrifice her family was making, when Dr. Burnaby was suddenly announced. She was startled. The little boys

were in perfect health and safe in the school-room with their tutor. The establishment, down to the minutest scullery-maid, was free from catarrh.

What business had he there at such a time!"

She felt that mischief was impending. Though so thoroughly worthy a man as the good doctor ought never to be invested with the attributes of the Stormy Petrel, his spontaneous appearance was an evil omen.

Luckily for Lady Harriet, he had no time to lose in ambiguous phrases. Old Burnaby was no diplomat; and so short a time did he expend in making her acquainted with the fatal fact that her well-to-do neighbours were reduced to a humbler level of life, that, instead of listening to the sequel with uplifted hands, upturned eyes, and the profound sympathy he had anticipated from her well-known good-will towards the family, her first impulse was to start from her seat, and vehemently ring the bell.

What could she want so suddenly? A glass of water? A bottle of Godfrey's salts? The

good doctor was half-inclined to seize her ladyship's hand and place a finger on her pulse! But no! She was full of animation No symptoms of syncope.—No fear of a swoon.

"Is the boy gone?—Has my letter been taken to Meadowes Court?" cried she, with a degree of abruptness almost worthy of her guest, and altogether foreign to her usual dignified reserve.

"I will inquire, my lady."

Unaware of the critical nature of the case, the rheumatic butler inquired so leisurely that, before his answer was rendered, and while Dr. Burnaby still sat wondering and tapping his snuff-box, Lady Harriet again addressed herself strenuously to the bell.

"The lad *is* gone, my lady. He went instantly on receiving your ladyship's orders."

"Then hurry after him, Blagrove. But no! you could not overtake him. Let Master Warneford's pony be saddled. John or the gardener must instantly follow him and bring back my letter."

"Bill will take across the fields, my lady, and—"

"No matter, no matter!—Some one can go round by the road, and meet him when he arrives at Meadowes Court. But let no mistake be made, Blagrove. I *must* have the letter back."

The old man retired, with a grave and thoughtful countenance. He had not forgotten —none in the household *had*—Miss Meadowes's frantic expedition from the Manor House to the death-bed of her father, which the utmost exertion had been unable to prevent.

When the door closed on him, Dr. Burnaby, evidently a little huffy at the interruption offered to his narrative, could not forbear observing:— "The letter your ladyship has so eagerly recalled, was doubtless calculated to aggravate the pain this sad discovery is about to inflict on our poor friends?"

"If it should reach its destination, it will at all events prove grievously mistimed," replied Lady Harriet, evasively. "But do you really believe, Doctor, that Sir Jervis's pretensions are well-grounded? Is there no hope—*no* hope—for poor Amy?"

"Not a shadow!—The Prestons, it seems, had their suspicions from the first. But they had some delicacy about mooting the question. Unluckily, however, old Preston observed to his son in presence of one of his clerks, that he should scruple to advise any client of *his* to purchase the Meadowes Court estate; for he was afraid no title could ever be made out. On the strength of which, some blackguard in the office made it his business to afford a private hint to Sir Jervis Meadowes. Ah! my dear lady!—In matters of business let not thy right hand know what thy left doeth; or thy words may be carried up even to the King's chamber."

Lady Harriet, who had often before taken occasion to resent the old doctor's unorthodox application of Scripture texts, looked solemn, and remained silent.—Perhaps she was listening for the return of old Blagrove's footsteps across the hall.—The doctor of course imagined that his adjuration had made a suitable impression on her mind.

"And how far may we count upon your

ladyship," said he, after allowing some minutes' pause to her cogitations, "to assist us in disclosing these painful facts to the ladies at Meadowes Court?"

Lady Harriet looked bewildered, and tried to recover the use of her faculties. But alas! her heart was still far away, with Bill the weeding-boy.

"Count upon *me*?" she reiterated at last, as if she had not heard a word of his preceding explanations.

"May we, in short, hope that your ladyship's aid will not be wanting in softening this sad blow to our poor friends?" persisted Dr. Burnaby, getting almost incensed by her evident absence of mind.

"Surely," she replied, drawing up with some dignity, "the executors of Sir Mark's will are the proper persons to apprise Lady Meadowes of the results of his culpable negligence?"

"The proper persons,—though perhaps not the fittest!" cried the doctor, starting up and planting himself on the hearth-rug without noticing her air of hauteur. "For, by Jove,

though my last birthday was my seventy-third, the ways of the world have not yet hardened my heart to sufficient firmness for the undertaking. However, that good Samaritan,—that worthy man yonder at the Rectory,—has consented to bear the brunt; and all I can do is to step in with my counsels and services, when the worst is known and has to be palliated. Good morning, Lady Harriet Warneford—I wish you a very good day."

The doctor's hat was in his hand, when Blagrove luckily appeared at the door, holding in *his* the fatal note; and lo! his lady, rescued at once from the terrors under which she had been labouring, became in a moment complacent, affable, and fluent. She was quite ready to assist in comforting the Meadowes family in any other capacity than as members of her own.—She proposed making her appearance at Meadowes Court early in the afternoon.

Somehow or other, as he gazed in Lady Harriet's countenance, the old doctor's mind misgave him that the iron gripe of worldliness was hardening her heart. He could not shake

her hand so cordially as usual, when again bidding her good-bye. Before he left the room, he saw her hastily commit to the flames the epistle she had recovered, as if she could not too speedily secure the extinction of so unpleasant a document.—But very little did he surmise with what eagerness she sat down, immediately on his departure, to address her nephew, re-enclosing the long letter of explanation intended for Amy,—and congratulate him on his escape.

"Another half-hour, and he would have been irretrievably committed to a marriage with a pauper!"

*

CHAPTER XII.

Mark Davenport, like other wilful men, was apt, when he *did* surrender himself to a new impulse, to give up without a struggle the keys of the fortress. His artistic eye had been singularly captivated by the picturesque and characteristic aspect of Hargood's daughter; and his somewhat rugged nature was touched by her patient servitude. He could not drive her from his mind. Through the fragrant clouds of his hookah, her sad face seemed gazing upon him from a distance. At length he determined to exorcise the spirit, as he had

done in similar cases, by transferring to canvas or paper the image that haunted him; as poets imprison an idea in a sonnet, or musicians in an *adagio*.

The gloomy studio with its stream of light falling from the lofty window was soon sketched in; and the slave of the easel was beginning to stand out from the background, in her pale grey blouse. But when it came to the stern but mournful face of the girl who, with the proportions of a child, looked as if she had never been young, the rapid hand of the artist paused, as from momentary compunction. —Mary Hargood's grave countenance seemed gazing at him reproachfully, as if he were unlawfully prying into the dimness of her melancholy life.

He threw aside his brush; and resumed the book he had left half open by the fireside.—It was Chamisso's striking story of Peter Schlemihl. But his eyes wandered listlessly over the pages. He could not — *could* not—recal his wandering attention.

"By Jove," cried he, at length, with sudden

impetuosity, which caused the terrier basking at his feet to start up barking as though it heard "a rat behind the arras," — "by Jove, that fellow was born to be a nigger-driver or a dentist. He weighs his own flesh and blood in the balance as though it were so much putty; and looks upon that gifted child as *my* father on one of his Leicester sheep,—calculating it at so much a pound. I'm not one of those who fancy women formed to live under a glass, like eggshell china, and other fragile curiosities. But hang it—one need not treat them quite like potter's clay!— 'Let us take care of the Beautiful,' said old Goethe. 'The Useful will take care of itself.'"

And back he went to his sketch; and by a few able touches, brought out the intellectual physiognomy of the youthful artist; creating,

under the shadow of her even brows,

the full-orbed dignity of Homer's Juno. Strange,—that so much could abide in proportions so diminutive!—

Scarcely had he satisfied himself by a certain conscious tingling of the cheeks (as if the forbidding but fascinating girl were again before him with her rebuking glances), that the likeness was one of the best he had ever produced, when the hurrying step of Hamilton Drewe upon the stairs startled him from his reverie; and his ejaculations concerning the threatened intrusion, were not much more complimentary than they had been towards Mary's taskmaster.

"Confounded bore, to have that moth perpetually buzzing about one's ears!" muttered Mark. "If he don't leave town shortly, I shall sport my oak as if in chambers, or fairly lock my door, as one does on the continent."

While giving utterance to these threats, he scuffled away into his dressing-room the block of paper on which he had been working.

"What are you shuffling out of sight, my dear Davenport?" inquired the poet, who, being in the habit of turning his own empty mind inside out as people turn their empty pockets, did not admit that others could have secrets to keep.

"Something I do not wish you to see," was the cool reply.

"But it is only a drawing?"

"If you know what it is, *why* so curious?"

"Not curious: only interested in every work of yours."

"But this is not work,—it is play."

"*Raison de plus. Do* let me see it?"

"Certainly *not*."

"Not when it is finished, my dear Davenport?"

"It will never be finished. Like the Cathedral at Cologne,—the Church of St Geneviève,—the Palace of the Louvre,—and the story of the Bear and the Fiddle, it is fated to be immortal in incompleteness.—But what has caused you, Drewe, to be armed *cap-a-pie* so early in the morning?—I never saw you dressed like a Christian before, till the sun was vertical."

"Because," replied his visitor, taking a letter from the pocket of a fur-coat built as if for an Arctic expedition, "because old Wroughton has just sent me an order for the private view of the

new gallery of Egyptian antiquities at the British Museum ; and I want you to come with me and inspect them."

"I have seen them already. I assisted at the packing. I was six months in Egypt on my way overland from India."

"Then I will go in search of Hargood," said Drewe, re-pocketing the ticket, and preparing to depart.

"Oh! if Hargood is to be of the party, I am your man," said Davenport. "Wait a moment, and I will be ready."

"I wonder why on earth I submit to your impertinent caprices!" cried Drewe, shrugging his shoulders.

"Simply as people overlook the rough coat of a pine-apple," was the cool rejoinder ;—"because you know me to be a fine fruit at the core.—By the way," continued he, as, some minutes afterwards they were driving through the damp dark narrow streets, towards the domicile of their literary friend—"has not Hargood a professional artist in his family,—

wife, sister, daughter, niece,—I forget what—to whom a sight of these pictures might be a blessing?"

"I had rather not invite his wife, who has been dead these six years.—He has probably a maiden sister,—for I never saw rooms kept in such apple-pie order."

"Ask her, then. It would be a charity."

"Charity begins at home; and I might be required to drive her in my cab."

"Not at all.—Send her with Hargood. But here we are," he continued, as his companion suddenly reined up. "Let me out, Drewe, and I will carry your message to our friend; for I don't care to be left in charge of your frisky bay, while you are making a short story a long one."

In a moment, the one bright brass bell-pull, in a line of dirty tarnished ones, had summoned the tidy parlour-maid of the Hargoods; by whom Davenport was primly informed that "Master was not at home."

"I know it. But I have a message to Miss

Hargood," said he, brushing vigorously past her up-stairs; and he had opened and traversed the chilly drawing-room, and knocked at the door of the studio, before the scared little woman had found time to close the street-door in the face of Hamilton Drewe.

A low sad voice bad him enter; and enter he did. And *there* stood the pale little artist, with the same palette and brush in her hand, and the same sad look in her eyes; stationed precisely on the same spot, with the same gleam of light falling upon her glossy hair.—It was like the realisation of a dream. Half-an-hour before, Davenport had been labouring to recal all these details, and fix them into reality by his pencil. And now, all was before him; his vision verified.

His explanations were hurriedly made. But Mary was not slow of comprehension.

"It is very kindly thought of on your part," said she, when he had made all clear.—"But even had my father been at home, I could not have accompanied you to-day. I have three

hours' work before me.—When my palette is prepared, I never work less than six hours."

"But for such an exceptional occasion—"

"Not exceptional to *me*. To-morrow is Saturday,—my father's holiday; and he has promised to take me to the Museum."

"To the *public* view."

"Public or private, the objects viewed will be the same.—We have a ticket for to-day, which we do not use. It is one of the advantages my father derives from his connection with the press, that such places are always open to us."

By this time, Davenport had made his way to the side of the artist, who had not so much as laid aside her brush in compliment to his presence.—With the keenness of a practised eye, he saw in a moment that several slight criticisms he had hazarded on the occasion of his former visit, had been carefully attended to.—The picture had grown and ripened during his absence. It was indeed a masterly production; and his praises were as fervent as sincere.

"You should attempt some original production, Miss Hargood," said he. "You are wasting the most precious time and talents on these copies."

"Not so long as I continue to receive commissions for them," she coldly replied. "Original composition is always a risk. Have you any further message, Mr. Davenport, to my father?"

This was uttered in so decided a tone of dismissal, that he felt it necessary to express his negative in a hasty leave-taking. Just in time! —for when he reached the street, the impatient Drewe was preparing to come in search of him.

"A surly, unmannerly, piece of goods!" muttered Davenport, as he re-adjusted himself in the cab.

"Of whom are you talking?"

"Miss Hargood."

"Oh! there *is* a sister then?"

"A dozen, for what I know or care. Hargood was out. But drive on for the love of Heaven;—for we have wasted so much time by

coming out of our way, that half the fools in London will have the start of us."

With very little ceremony would he have abandoned his companion altogether, now that all hope of the Hargoods' company was at an end; but that he felt a sort of hankering to see what Mary was to see on the morrow.

And apparently he felt so much more interested in the colossal faces of Memphis transplanted from the African wilds into those of Bloomsbury, than when he last beheld their impassible faces in the land of the Sun, as to fancy that he could not visit them too often. For, in spite of many wise resolves to the contrary, on the morrow he returned; exhibiting of course as much surprise when he found himself face to face with Hargood and his daughter, as if he had gone thither for any other purpose than that of meeting them.

On their part, surprise was neither felt nor assumed. Both were engrossed by the novel and interesting spectacle before them; nor was it till Hargood perceived that Davenport had information to impart concerning Egypt, its

ancient mysteries and modern government, that he took much heed of his presence. That any friend of Hamilton Drewe should turn out an acute observer, and be able to relate with precision and without affectation what he had accurately examined, was an unexpected satisfaction. Warmed by the attention bestowed upon him, Mark Davenport described with graphic eloquence the wonders of Thebes and the desolation of Tadmor.

"I have some sketches made on the spot, which I should very much like to show to Miss Hargood," he continued, while the critic, with his brows knitted and his arms folded, stood contemplating the colossal faces which have been staring the world out of countenance for so many ages. "I would offer to send them to your house for her inspection; but that I fear many of my sketches stand as much in need of verbal explanation as the Red Lion of immortal memory."

"Have you got them with you in town?—Why not let us see them at your lodgings?" demanded Hargood, with the utmost simplicity.

For the shallow etiquettes of life were thoroughly out of his sphere; and having already visited Captain Davenport's perfectly decorous apartments, he saw no reason why he might not take his daughter there, for a purpose all but professional. It was their weekly holiday. The only obstacle he suggested was that Mary might be tired by so long a walk.

Startled by such ready compliance almost into regretting that he had made the proposal, Mark Davenport began to reconsider whether his sketch-block might not be found lying on the table, displaying the interior of Mary's studio, and betraying the interior of his heart. He would perhaps have felt inclined, like Boccacio's hero who sacrificed his falcon to feast a beloved guest, to wring the neck of the pink cockatoo in her honour, but for the extraordinary composure with which the apathetic young lady acceded to her father's proposal. She entered his bachelor's sanctum as unconcernedly as she would have crossed the threshold of a railway station!

Scarcely however could he refrain from telling her, as she warmed her hands at his fire, how much she had been thought of and dreamed of within those walls. But he restrained himself. He was beginning to understand the nature of Hargood sufficiently to know that *he* must fancy himself the first object of the visit, or that it would never be repeated. For his daughter to be raised into more than a mere supplement to himself would have soured his humour for the day.

As it was, he laid the flattering unction to his soul, that to enjoy the pleasure and benefit of his conversation, a rough young soldier like Davenport extended his hospitality even to his poor little yea-nay child.

They turned leisurely over the Egyptian portfolio ;—Mr. Hargood entering largely into historic doubts and antiquarian disquisitions. But though fully appreciating the vigour and grace of the sketches, not a syllable of praise escaped the lips of Mary. She had been brought up to regard the language of compliment as

contemptible, — a noxious aliment acceptable only to children and fools.—But Davenport was content. She had taken off her shabby straw-bonnet so as to display her well-turned head and the prettiest little ear in the world; and thrown wide her heavy woollen shawl,—not to exhibit her well-fitting black-silk dress, but the better to approach and admire the drawings extended on the table before her.—Already, she seemed perfectly at home: and never before had so intelligent a face brightened the atmosphere of that solitary lodging.

By Davenport's orders, a cup of hot tea was brought, which the coldness of the day rendered acceptable; and by the time Mary Hargood was thoroughly cheered and carried out of herself by the novel *chef-d'œuvres* placed before her, she could no longer disguise her consciousness of the *bien être* she experienced.

"How happy you must be here!" said she, abruptly addressing Davenport, after a glance round the room, which comprehended even the bird and the terrier.

"Is any one happy any where?" he replied,

by way of concealing his delight at this unconscious betrayal of her satisfaction.

"Here is a face that portends perfect contentment," observed Hargood, laying his hand on a portrait of Hugh Davenport, — one of the earliest attempts in water-colours of his brother.

"Perfect contentment and perfect excellence!" replied Marcus; "the best of all human beings, —my brother Hugh."

"Ay, by the way. What has become of that paragon of brothers?" inquired Hargood. "Am I never to see him but in effigy? The day we dined at Richmond, you mentioned that you were expecting him in town."

"I am expecting him still. But he is at his old lunes; renouncing his own pleasures to comfort the sorrowful and heal the sick. My mother has lately lost her only brother; and though they had not been on speaking terms for the last thirty years, remorse of conscience has replaced on this occasion the instincts of natural affection. She probably reproaches herself for having allowed him to slip out of

the world unreconciled ; for I find she is terribly cut up."

"The sisterly attachment which could hold itself suspended for the third of a century, can scarcely, however, be of a very potent quality," rejoined Hargood. "I have not much faith in these posthumous atonements. But since you have so recently lost an uncle, Captain Davenport, how comes it you are not in mourning?"

"You may well rebuke me. Alas! I am apt to deport myself far from respectfully towards conventional forms. I never saw this old man. His very name was tabooed among us: and I should almost as soon have thought of ordering myself a black coat for the King of Ashantee. I am wrong, however. For his memory is intitled to some reverence.—There lived not a truer-hearted British sportsman, or kinder-hearted British gentleman, than poor Sir Mark Meadowes."

That Davenport rambled on with this family history in a manner so unusual to him,—for no one was less communicative on personal topics,

even with his intimates,—was a proof that he talked less out of the abundance of his heart, than from the abstraction of his intellects. His attention was absorbed by the quiet feminine figure seated on his sofa; so much at home,—so congenial with the spot,—that the dog had deserted for her side its customary place on the hearthrug; and Cocotte was sidling across the back of the sofa with coaxing gestures, to assume the place upon her shoulder which it was accustomed to do upon that of its master.

The picture thus afforded, was a charming *tableau de genre;* and Davenport was probably studying it with a view to a second *croquis*.

While thus entranced, he was startled by a sudden movement on the part of Hargood, who abruptly set down upon the table the cup of tea he had been holding.

"Sir Mark *whom* did you say?" he inquired, as though he misdoubted his senses.

"Meadowes, of Meadowes Court; as I suppose the Baronetage or the Landed Gentry books would style him," replied Davenport,

still gazing on the graceful contour of his fair guest.

"And who, may I ask, was his wife?" said Hargood, in a tremulous voice.

"*That*, faith, I can hardly tell you.—Something low and disgraceful, I'm afraid, from the manner in which he was sent to Coventry by the elders of the family;—some waiting-maid,—or worse—"

"*You lie, Sir!*"—cried Hargood, in a tone that thrilled to the very marrow of his daughter, and caused Davenport to start forward as though a weapon had been thrust into his side.

"Father,—father—" interposed the terrified Mary, too well aware of the violence of his nature; and clinging to his arm as though she foresaw that to words so harsh, blows would probably follow.

"I say again, *he lies!*"—cried Hargood, with quivering lips and panting emotion. "She was good and virtuous as his own mother;—a gentlewoman, though humbled by misfortune,—a governess, but a clergyman's daughter,—*my*

father's daughter, Sir,—my sister,—my only sister!"

"Hargood—you are forgiven—and it is now my turn to crave your pardon," said Captain Davenport,—the fire which for an instant had flashed from his eyes being lost in a look of the deepest concern. "My offence was one of complete but pardonable ignorance. All I ever heard of my uncle's wife was learned, in forbidden moments, from the gossiping of servants."

"A worthy source for such infamous detraction!"—cried Hargood, still unappeased.

"You cannot imagine that I would have wilfully insulted you," earnestly persisted Captain Davenport.—"You do not surely suppose that I was in the slightest degree aware of the connection between us?"

"As little as myself. You would else have shunned the society of the literary hack, as loathingly as *I* should have avoided communication with any member of a family by whom my poor sister had been so disgracefully trampled on.—Your name is not a rare one;

I did not connect it with the race of her persecutors.—Ours is too plebeian even to have attracted your notice.—Mary, child! your bonnet and shawl—!" he continued, suddenly addressing his daughter; down whose blanched checks tears were beginning to flow.

"At least do not leave the house in so bitter a spirit," pleaded Davenport. "I offer you every apology in my power—I will do and say anything you desire. Only give me your hand at parting."

For a moment, Hargood seemed disposed to comply. But a sudden revulsion of angry feeling got the better of him, as he put aside the extended hand of Davenport, who had followed him to the door.

"I *can't!*"—cried he. "By the God who made me, I can't,—*I can't!*—'a servant-maid or worse.'—My sister—my poor sister!"

He went straight out of the room, still muttering indignant ejaculations; and poor Mary followed, in trembling silence. As she crossed the threshold, she raised her large eyes

filled with tears to the harassed face of Davenport, and quietly extended her hand.

"Try to make peace between us," he whispered, gratefully pressing it.—"Pray, pray let us be friends!"

But his words were lost in the sobs of his departing guest.

CHAPTER XIII.

In the course of the painful disclosures which it was now necessary to make to Lady Meadowes, so completely did she rise to the standard of excellence by which her champion the Rector had measured her character, that only once was a harsh word forced from her lips. She bore with patience the announcement that herself and her child were reduced from affluence to comparative poverty. She submitted without repining to the necessity of quitting for ever the home of her married life. But when Dr. Burnaby with more zeal

than tact ventured to avow in her presence those displeasures against poor Sir Mark which he had so openly expressed to Lady Harriet, she stopped him at once.

"Negligence,—but not *culpable* negligence, my dear Doctor," said she. "You have no right to apply such a word to the conduct of my husband.—He did his best for us, according to his knowledge and judgment."

"He ought to have known *better*. Those who undertake the responsibilities and duties of a family, ought to make them their study."

"Sir Mark entrusted his affairs to the better wisdom of professional advisers. If they failed to instruct him, on *their* heads be the fault. But once for all, let no blame be imputed to him I have lost."

"The woman's a dunderhead after all," mused the provoked old gentleman as he drove from the door. "On *their* heads be the fault indeed!—As if they cared a rush about the matter!—On hers and little Amy's head will fall the penalty. She don't know what she's talking about. For the last thirty years, poor

ailing soul, she has been wrapt up in cotton,—the winds of Heaven not allowed to visit her cheek too roughly. And now she fancies it will be all pleasantness and pastime to go and live in lodgings, and see that pretty creature, Amy, snubbed and scoffed at by upstarts not worthy to carry her clogs. Even the darling herself looks on, as complacent as a cherub; ignorant, poor child, of the accursed realities of the case:—pinching poverty and undeserved humiliation."

Would the sympathising old man have been better pleased, had he known the truth?—that Amy Meadowes was cognizant to the full extent of the evil which had befallen her;—and that she had scarcely tasted food,—scarcely closed her eyes,—since she heard her sentence of exile from the spot she loved so dearly;—the scenes of her youth,—the grave of her lamented father!

It mattered not that Lady Meadowes had assumed in her presence an attitude of perfect resignation. It mattered not that the naked fact of their banishment from their happy home

had been clothed by the Rector in words of soothing plausibility.—Had her own welfare only been involved in the event, she might have been induced to accept it as a trial against which she had no right to rebel. But her poor mother!—It needed not all the tears shed by old Nichols over the miseries awaiting his poor dear lady, to apprise her of the extent of the evil.

"Mother, dear mother,"—said she, sinking on her knees by Lady Meadowes's bedside, on the second night after the worst had been communicated to them;—having stolen back to her mother's chamber after taking leave of her for the night, unable to bear in her own the monotonous clicking of the watch, and the flickering of the wood on the old hearth.—"Let me stay by you to-night: let me comfort you. I know you cannot be sleeping.—How can either of us sleep!—Talk to me, mother. Let me hear the sound of your voice. Let me learn your thoughts.—Till now, I always fancied that I knew them,—that we lived together like sisters,—like friends. But since this dreadful

stroke, I have seen clearer. I now find that I know nothing of your inward feelings.—Mother—what is to become of us if we do not clearly understand each other!"—

As yet incapable of utterance, Lady Meadowes replied to this earnest appeal by encircling the neck of her daughter with her languid arm, and drawing her fondly towards her pillow. For some minutes, they wept together in silence.

"Fear nothing, my darling Amy," said she at length. "For my sake, as for your own, be brave,—be strong.—We *are* strong, my child; strong in mutual affection, that will enable us to bear and surmount any sorrow *this* world can give."

Amy would not grieve her by dissent. But she was beginning to think otherwise. She was beginning to believe that, once estranged from their familiar haunts, and when their home knew them no longer, they should stand in need of new friends to afford them courage and comfort.—Everything beyond the limits of Radensford,—and *there* it would have been

cruel to entreat her bereaved mother to abide, —presented to the inexperienced girl vague pictures of strife and torment: of an angry over-reaching crowd, jeering two defenceless women.

"Dearest mother, surely I heard you request Dr. Burnaby to inform those people,—those lawyers of Sir Jervis's,—that we were ready to quit Meadowes Court at once?" said she faintly.

"Better make a virtue of necessity, Amy. Do not let us wait to be turned out."

"No, no! Situated as we are, the effort cannot be made too soon. It is only prolonging torment to linger on. I am quite prepared to go, mother. But whither?"

"I have scarcely yet considered. To Clifton, perhaps. The distance is inconsiderable, and the climate likely to be favourable to my health."

"Then let us go there at once. But, dearest mother,—if I were not afraid of vexing and hurting you, there is one question I should like to ask—"

"Ask it, Amy,—I am callous to suffering *now*."

"I once ventured to talk to you of our relations:—*not* the Davenports; if they did not like us in my poor father's lifetime, they are not likely to be kinder now. I mean your own family. Surely *some* of them must survive?"

"Would that I could answer you. When I married, I had a dear and only brother, some years younger than myself:—an impetuous, headstrong boy; who chose to resent the conduct of the Meadowes family in such terms, and to insult your father so grossly, that reconciliation became impossible. For some time, though thus estranged, I managed to follow his movements from a distance. But at length, by a sudden change, I lost all clue to his abode. He was poor, Amy; poor and obscure. I sometimes thought he purposely baffled my search, that he might evade the little officious kindnesses with which I had pursued him. And now, I might as well look for a grain of sand on the shore, as for my poor brother in

that great metropolis where I left him struggling for bread."

"It is indeed a hopeless prospect," said Amy, mournfully. "I was in hopes that some single hand,—some single strong arm,—might be in reserve to protect us."

Lady Meadowes replied by a heavy sigh. She had been in hopes so too.—But it was not the hand of which Amy had been dreaming. With the sagacity of a mother's eye, she had noted the impression made by her daughter upon William Eustace; and though at the moment far from eager to promote a prepossession which she feared would not be sanctioned by his parents, yet since her great misfortune, Lady Harriet had inadvertently let fall so many hints of the growth and stability of her nephew's passion, and of her hopes that in the sequel a closer connection might unite, as near relatives, those who had been friends so long, that the poor invalid had permitted herself to look forward to a happy settlement in life for the dear child,

the loss of whose society would have been to her as a sentence of death.

But of late these allusions had ceased. For a week past, no mention of William Eustace's name. His aunt seemed to have forgotten his existence.—Lady Meadowes trusted only that Amy might be less interested than herself in so sudden a change:—that she might never have noted Lady Harriet's insinuations, or be looking out vainly, like herself, for the appearance of a faithless champion.

It was some allusion to this subject she had apprehended from Amy's uncontrollable distress of mind. She felt thankful to find that her daughter's yearnings were after the solace of natural ties; and was comforted when the repining girl consented to receive her parting benediction for the night, and retire to rest in her own adjoining room.

But the chord which Amy had touched did not cease to vibrate. Throughout the watches of the night, the image of the brother from whom she had been so long parted, kept recurring to the mind of Lady Meadowes. She

could not accuse herself of having neglected him. She had done all that a person disconnected from London and active life could effect, to obtain a clue to his residence.—But often as she had grieved before, on *his* account, that he chose to hold himself aloof, it was now on her own she began to lament his estrangement. If she should die, (and her heart often sank within her from growing weakness,) who was to protect her orphan child? Her good neighbours at the Rectory and at Radensford were kind and willing. But both were aged; and they had families and household cares of their own. Her brother—she recalled him to her mind's eye as when, a fine lion-hearted young fellow of twenty, though only a struggling and a poor servitor,—he had rushed up from Oxford, on hearing of the insults offered to her by the Meadowes family, and done her irreparable injury by his intemperate interference.—His noble forehead,—his open countenance,—his close-curled raven hair,—rose up before her. Already highly excited, the impression upon her nerves became so vivid,

that she could almost have fancied he was present;—her feverish condition being such as has produced more than half the best-attested ghost-stories on record.—Even when, towards morning, she dropped asleep, the last impression she retained — an impression that prevailed during her almost somnambulistic sleep,—was that Edward Hargood was watching over her.

Such being the disordered state of her imagination, it was not wonderful that when, on waking next morning and ringing her bell some hours later than usual, and on inquiring for her daughter she was told that Miss Amy was engaged in the drawing-room, speaking to a gentleman who had arrived from town,—her half-murmured exclamation should be—"I knew it!—My brother is come at last."

She made an effort to rise hastily; which, like most hasty efforts, defeated itself. For before her toilet was half accomplished, she was forced by faintness to lie down again.—Her daughter was instantly fetched: a great relief to Amy; to whom the "gentleman in

the drawing-room" had proved a most embarrassing visitor. Not Edward Hargood, however:—no one but his sister could have imagined so improbable an incident as his falling from the clouds upon Meadowes Court; and though from the flush upon her cheek as she approached, Lady Meadowes discerned in a moment that the interview from which she had been summoned was one of unusual interest, she was too feeble to utter a syllable of inquiry.

Amy waited till she was alone with her mother to allude to it. Even when she simply announced—"Mr. Eustace, mamma, has been here,"—she trusted Lady Meadowes would conclude that he had walked over from the Manor House, to make formal inquiries after their health. She did not wish her mother's mind to be agitated, as her own had recently been.

Lady Meadowes's murmured ejaculation of "Thank Heaven!" undeceived her at once: even before she found the hand enfolding her own, to be moistened with tears. She dared not, however, interrogate her as to the motive

of her gratitude. The mother was the first to speak.

"I was sadly, sadly afraid, dear Amy," said she, "that he would not return. I feared that his parents would never countenance his attachment."

"You were aware of it then, mother?—Yet he assures me he had never said a word to you on the subject."

"A mother's eye, my child, is to be trusted on such points. All I dreaded was that I had been too sanguine."

"You wish to lose me, then?"—said Amy, with a swelling heart.

"For myself, I do not allow myself a wish. For you, all I desire is a safe and happy home."

Amy's face grew sadder and sadder. It was grievous to think how great a disappointment was preparing for that kind unselfish mother.

"Is Mr. Eustace gone?" inquired Lady Meadowes, endeavouring to rally her strength.—"When shall I see him?" When will he return? When are we to meet?"

"Never, dear mother!" replied Amy, in a low, unsteady voice. "But could I have thought—could I have believed—your heart was set my upon marrying him, I should have found much less courage to assure him just now that I could never become his wife!"

"You have *refused* William Eustace?" faltered Lady Meadowes.

The assent implied by Amy's grave silence was not to be mistaken.

"And why?—You always appeared to like his society?"

"As an acquaintance, mother; as nearer my own age than Dr. Burnaby or Admiral Tremenheere."

"But during his illness, you showed such tokens of interest!—"

"He was Lady Harriet's favourite nephew. We were inmates under the same roof."

"Surely, surely, Amy," pleaded Lady Meadowes, still more surprised and distressed, "you have no secret object of preference? You have seen no one worthy to supplant—"

"On that point, be perfectly easy, dearest

mother," interrupted Amy.—"I have no other love or liking.—All I desire is that I never *may*.—Let us still be all in all to each other, and I am content. But to marry for an establishment,—for bread,—a man for whom I feel no affection,—would degrade me in my own eyes, and render my life a burthen."

"I can say no more," said Lady Meadowes, with her usual meek resignation. But her eyes brimming with tears could not conceal from her daughter the greatness of her disappointment. —She tried to busy herself in dressing, to avoid dwelling too painfully on the subject.—But her movements were so languid and her air so depressed, that Amy was forced to avert her face and stifle her self-reproaches: gazing vaguely from the dressing-room window over a vast expanse of half-melted snow, varied only by leafless woods and a few mournful fir-trees;—a cheering contemplation for her wounded heart.

A heavy sigh from Lady Meadowes, who was now reclining in her arm-chair, roused poor Amy from her reverie.

"Let it afford some consolation to you, mother," said she, suddenly turning her tearful face towards Lady Meadowes, "to know that Mr. Eustace's offer of his hand was made under circumstances which even *you* will admit to be a sufficient justification of my refusal;—though I admit that I was wholly unaware of them when I declined his proposals.—He has asked me to be his wife in direct defiance of his father's authority. His parents have positively refused their consent.—Lady Harriet has done her utmost to dissuade him from the match.—Friends,—family,—all were against it."

A deep flush,—but not of indignation or resentment,—overspread the pale face of Lady Meadowes.

"Mr. Eustace would probably not have confided so much to me, had I evinced the gratitude which he seemed to think his confession demanded," resumed Amy, reddening in her turn. "But when he found that instead of being amazed at his asking a penniless girl to be his wife, I frankly told him we could

never be happy together, he lost his temper; and with as little delicacy as justified my previous opinion of him, apprised me of all he had sacrificed and all he had braved, in order to court what he called my ungracious rejection."

Lady Meadowes shuddered at the idea of her young and timid daughter having been exposed to a scene of so much emotion.

"Mr. Eustace had no right to force such an explanation on you," said she, "unauthorised by myself or your guardians.—It was a disrespect to us all that he sought this private interview."

"On that head, dear mother, let him stand excused," said Amy. "He came here to see *you*,—he asked for *you* only. But you were too unwell to be disturbed; and, little surmising the object of his visit, I hurried into the drawing-room to explain it. I believe he was not quite master of himself. He has been harassed and upbraided on my account by his family; and the dread that Lady Harriet might be beforehand with him here, to acquaint you with

his father's threats and exasperation, hastened his explanations and rendered his manner so flurried and excited, that it was indeed a relief when the interview was at an end."

"Then let us talk of it no more, my darling child," said Lady Meadowes, folding her daughter to her heart. "A marriage under such auspices was indeed undesirable. I have only to be thankful that I was mistaken in my estimate of your feelings towards him. Let us talk of him no more."

Need it be added that Amy, in affording these explanations to her mother, had extenuated much, in order to spare her a single unnecessary pang. It would have been cruel to let Lady Meadowes suspect the humiliation to which she had been subjected. On her own part, perhaps, she had been slightly to blame. Preoccupied by her family sorrows, forced to receive him in the half-dismantled drawing-room already prepared for the projected sale, she had thought more of herself,—far more of her mother,—than of *him*, when, with all a lover's eager energy he accosted her; and, very

early in their interview, burst into an avowal of his feelings, impetuous in proportion to the restraints through which he had broken. Had she listened with any sort of emotion,—even terror,—even pity,—he would have been content. From a nature so gentle he had not anticipated any vehement display of passion. It was possible that her affections might be otherwise engaged. But even in that case, he had hoped to find her exhibit some sensibility to all he had suffered, all he was prepared to suffer, for her sake.

But Amy remained impassive, frigid, absent: and her rejection of his suit was uttered in a tone of politeness which cut him to the soul. That she was asked to become the wife of the son and heir of a wealthy baronet,—one cherished by the London clubs, and reckoned on by political parties, seemed to her a matter scarcely deserving her attention!

Was this to be borne? Was such cutting contempt to be endured? When at length she attempted to put an end to the interview by pleading her attendance on her mother, the

rage and indignation of the disappointed man burst forth like a torrent. He accused her of coquetry during their sojourn at the Manor House. He accused her of cold-heartedness,—selfishness,—ingratitude: and showed, if not expressly in words, by insinuations, an arrogant consciousness of his own superiority of birth and fortune.

"I have to thank you at all events," was her proud reply, "for having so clearly demonstrated the truth of my assertion that there is no sympathy between us, and that we could never be happy together. I trust I am incapable of endeavouring to wound by taunts a being weaker than myself, broken-spirited by recent affliction—"

"Amy—Amy!"

"I trust I am incapable of insulting one whom I profess to love, by allusions to their humbler birth or meaner fortunes—"

"Make at least some allowance for the anguish of a heart which your indifference has cut to the core—"

"I make none, Mr. Eustace. The wound

has served only to exhibit its inmost nature, and justify my assertion. There is nothing, no, *nothing* in common between us! To gain my esteem and love, a man must possess *real* superiority—superiority of mind and heart:—the power of attaining distinction in public life, and conferring happiness at home."

"I did not know you were so ambitious," replied Eustace, resuming his tone of bitterness, on finding himself thus calmly depreciated. "I have indeed to apologise for having hoped to obtain indulgence for my humble abilities and unattractive disposition. Now that I better understand the contemptuous light in which you regard me, believe me, I shall carefully abstain from intruding again into the presence of one so fastidious. I had thought you simpler-hearted, Amy,—kinder,—softer,—more prone to womanly impulses.—Farewell! May your aspirings never mislead you. May you never feel the want of a strong arm and devoted heart, to protect you through the rough places of this world. Farewell, Amy Meadowes. Let us at least part as friends."

He extended his hand.

But Amy, resentful, perhaps a little *self*-resentful,—touched it with unconcealed reluctance, and dropped it hastily. Before she turned her averted face towards him, he had quitted the room.

He had even quitted the house, however, before the tumult, already stirring in her bosom, found relief in a burst of tears; passionate and spontaneous as those of childhood, but alas! far less easily dried and forgotten.

insulting marriage proposal from Eustace
Very similar to Darcy's 1st proposal

CHAPTER XIV.

ILFORD CASTLE is a beautiful spot, situated in one of the most favoured counties in the district of Lake-land; where, albeit, as Coleridge writes—

> The spring comes slowly up that way,

even winter has it charm. An English home usually boasts its cheerful fringe of evergreens, to form, in combination with the glowing hearths within, a factitious, nameless season, which has no direct mission from the sun.

Captain Davenport, as he drove up towards what it becomes our wirewove pages to call the "hall of his ancestors," pondered upon these things.

"By Jove! how comfortable it all looks," said he, as he wrapped his railway rug of racoon-skins closer round him, in the fly that conveyed himself and his traps from the railway station. "How Christmassy and cheerful, with its hospitable blue smokes circling from the roof, like one of Washington Irving's Utopian pictures of British domesticity! And how wrong I have been to muddle my brains and derange my system among the November fogs of yonder confounded metropolis. Here, I might have been happy,—here, I might have been well,—here, I might have been——"

He paused. A burst of monologic laughter startled him in the midst of his soliloquy. In a moment, the real state of things at Ilford Castle flashed upon his mind:—recalling to memory a sketch he had once made after one of Æsop's fables, of the Fox moralising over a Vizard.

"Ah!—well!"—was his secondary view of the case and the place:—"it needs to have been in Bridewell and worn the handcuffs, to know that so goodly-looking edifice is but a prison."

He no longer, however, even in thought, ventured to call Ilford Castle a prison, when welcomed under the portico by his cordial brother; or folded to the heart of Lady Davenport, on the threshold of her own apartment. Attired in the deepest mourning, his mother looked worn and harassed; and the manner in which she leant back in his enfolding arms to look earnestly in his face, as if to read the secret of his welfare, seemed to apprise him that she sought comfort from the source that was dearest to her heart.

He *knew* that it was the source dearest to her:—he, the prodigal son,—the reckless,—the graceless,—*knew* that he was preferred to his more deserving brother. And he felt almost angry that, with such a resource at hand against the sterility of her destiny in being yoked with a nature inferior to her own, as the

counsels and company of her elder son, she should look for comfort to himself:—a Satyr to Hyperion!

"And you are come at last, my own dear Mark," said she, scarcely able to stanch the tears which afforded a mother's greeting to the truant. "Hugh and I have wanted you sadly!"

"And my father?"

"Lord Davenport has so lost all patience, that he has ceased to talk about your delay."

"But is he prepared with extenuating circumstances?—Is the fatted calf on the spit, or am I doomed to husks and recriminatory lectures?"

"That will depend on yourself. But for all our sakes, my own dear son, do not wantonly provoke them. Your father is not in—in cheerful spirits."

"You mean that he is savage and out of temper?"

"I mean that he has had lately more than his share of annoyance and provocation."

"Who is to measure a man's lawful share?

Is it possible that I find *you*, mother, you so pious and resigned, at odds with the justice of Providence?"

"Do not pervert my words.—I mean that he has been grievously thwarted in political life—"

"By the defeat of a party to which he ought to be ashamed to attach his name and influence!"

"No, no, by the defeat of a *principle*,—a principle which has been the ruling passion of his life.—The times, too, are miserably bad for agriculturists."

"When are they ever good for agriculturists?—Always too much rain, or too little; or unfair taxation,—or undue repeal of taxes."

"And then your brother Hugh,—dear and good as he is,—has completely disappointed his father's views."

"Because my father wanted him to become a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal; a millionnaire in the copper currency of vulgar popularity,—a man to be bought off by some

future government with an additional pearl or two to the family coronet; or,—who knows?—eventually strangled with a Garter!—Instead of which, my brother is wise as Solomon, and just as Minos."

"My dearest Mark—why so bitter?" mildly remonstrated his mother.

"Because—because—because I'm afraid I have naturally something of the crabstock in my nature," said he, not daring to assign the real motive of his unfilial outbreak.—"However, mother, for *your* sake, I will endeavour to engraft better fruit upon it. I fear," he continued, glancing hurriedly at her suit of sables, and then significantly at the door, "I greatly fear you have yourself lately had cause for sorrow—"

Lady Davenport's brow contracted.

"I would not for worlds give you pain, mother—but—"

"If you *really* would not give me pain, say no more on the subject," replied Lady Davenport. "Let it suffice that I have lost my nearest living relative;—with the conscious-

ness of having acted an unworthy part towards him."

"Thank you, at least, for *that* admission," said her son, taking her hand and fervently kissing it—a little to the surprise of Lady Davenport. A moment afterwards, Hugh made his appearance; having allowed what he believed to be time enough for confidential conversation between his mother and her favourite child. Then came their young sister, Olivia, blushing and formal from the school-room; always a little in awe of her bronzed and travelled brother. They soon, however, began to talk themselves out of the awkwardness which absence is apt to engender even among those most closely united;—and mother, brother, sister, were as undisguisedly enchanted at Marcus's having condescended to come down and spend his Christmas among them, as though he were a lost sheep restored to the family fold.

Even Lord Davenport rejoiced, after his kind, over the arrival of his younger son:—gave him his whole hand instead of his customary three

fingers; and went to the frantic extremity of a second bottle of claret. But this effort of hospitality had better have been omitted. For, under its influence, both father and son gradually laid aside those restraints over the unruly member, which were alone likely to maintain peace between the two.

"If the weather continues open, Marcus, which I doubt," said his lordship, "I should like to take you to-morrow over the home-farm. I never saw the Swedes, or indeed any of the winter crops, look anything like what they are looking this Christmas. Smith, my new bailiff, has done wonders; a very superior man, Marcus, is Smith. We have sent two fat oxen and a heifer up to the Smithfield Show; and a pair of Herefords to Edinburgh, which I flatter myself will make some sensation. As to my pigs, both my mixed breed and my pure Chinas obtained premiums at the Kendal Exhibition.—Yes, I have every reason to be proud of Smith."

"Pity that you can't exhibit *him* and get a premium for a prize bailiff! It would be the higher ambition of the two," muttered Mark,

who was waxing fractious under the pressure of the plough and harrow.

"I think you will find that we have made some wonderful improvements, Mark, *won-der-ful* improvements!" added the lord of Ilford, gradually sunning himself in the genial warmth of the huge wood fire, and the Château Margaux.

"I am glad to hear it, my lord," replied his son, "and heartily trust I may *see* it. I glanced, however, down Quag Lane as I drove here this evening,—and regretted to perceive that horrible line of old cottages still standing,—or rather, still falling."

"There's ten years' life in them yet, I flatter myself," replied Lord Davenport. "Ilton Cottages bring me in something like sixty-seven pounds a-year, Mark."

"More shame for them," was Mark's dauntless rejoinder. "I should like to hear the opinion of your lordship's pigs, if turned into them for a sty!"

"The people are satisfied with them,—which

is more to the purpose. Most of the inhabitants were born there."

"And how many of them have died there? Does your lordship remember the fever in 1832?"—

"You have taken up the humanity-dodge, have you, Mark?" sneered Lord Davenport, whose sacramental notions of "improving" an estate consisted of high-farming and high rent. "Like Hugh yonder,—who seems half asleep; and is probably dreaming of labourers' model-cottages, or some other philanthropical toy of that description; — agrarian playthings, woven in spun sugar!"

"I was dreaming of something far less important, I am afraid," said Hugh, starting up, anxious to give a new turn to the conversation. "I was wondering how many days your lordship would claim to lionise my brother; before I made an appointment with my friend Harley, for his otter hounds?"

The bait took.—The sportsman was roused in a moment. Otter-hunting was one of the

pastimes of his youth which Mark Davenport had never happened to enjoy elsewhere than in his native county. And he was now full of questions concerning the sport of the season,—the strength of the pack,—and the probability that Mr. Harley would give them an early meet in their own neighbourhood.

Lord Davenport, who had not vigour of soul or body for sportsmanship of any description, did not of course refuse himself a snarl at the humanity of his otter-hunting sons. He tried in vain, however, to draw back the conversation to Smith and his mangold wurzel; and revenged himself for the disrespectful apathy of his son Mark by talking of poor-law and pauper bastilles till coffee was announced, in a style that might have converted even his wooden brethren of the Quarter Sessions, into stone.

"No smoking allowed in any of the company's carriages, I find," said Mark to his brother, when they met, that night, in the comfortless dressing-room allotted to Hugh,

—because in the late lord's time, it had been apportioned to his father as son and heir.

"No—on that point, my father and mother are alike rigid. Those, who cannot dispense with a cigar, must repair to the stable-yard."

"Pleasant winter quarters upon my word!—The governor seems as companionable as ever, my dear Hugh;—as much inclined to live and let live."

"He has been unusually cheerful to-night in honour of your arrival," replied the simple-hearted Hugh, deceived by his irony.

"And my mother,—poor soul,—how thin and depressed she is looking. Tell me, dear Hugh—you were here when she received tidings of her brother's death. How did they reach her?"

"My father read the announcement aloud from the newspaper.—He chooses always to be the first to dispense the news brought by the Times."

"And was she very deeply affected?"

"You know how she makes it a point of

conscience to conceal her feelings from my father, if likely to annoy him. She said little, —shed few tears.—But next morning, she looked ten years older."

"And does so still. But explain to me a little about old Sir Mark Meadowes, and his widow—"

"I know little more than yourself. His dowager mother, old Lady Meadowes, quarrelled with him for marrying his sister's governess; and my father has consistently kept up the quarrel. There was no congeniality of character between them. They differed in politics as on most other points. And I suspect my father was glad to shake off a half-ruined brother-in-law, who had disgraced the family by a low connection."

"What my father was glad of, or sorry for, is scarce worth speculating upon!" cried Mark, who, in pure impatience, was beginning to tear impatiently into shreds the pages of his Bradshaw—the only specimen of ancient or modern literature to be found in one of

the bed-chambers of Ilford Castle. "But that my mother should submit to it!—"

"When does she do otherwise than 'submit?' Her whole life has been an act of submission."

"Say of slavishness!"—cried the indignant Mark.—"And we two, Hugh, are getting as ad as herself:

They who allow oppression share the crime."

"A sonorous watchword of sedition!" said Hugh,—smiling at his vehemence. "But when experience proves that the resistance of the weak against the strong only drives them into grosser tyranny, passive obedience becomes not only an act of policy, but a virtue."

"I deny it to be either!—Had my poor mother steadily resisted from the first my father's system of domestic oppression, he would not have hardened into what he is."

"And *she* would not be half the angel she is; and we should love her far less dearly."

"Speak for yourself, Hugh. For *my* share, I should respect her twice as much."

"And yet, my blustering brother, I suspect that, should a Mrs. Marcus D. ever appear on the boards, and pretend to have a will of her own, it will only be hers in so far as you have peremptorily assigned it to her."

Marcus paused a moment in his work of destruction.—He had more than once secretly taxed himself with having inherited something of his father's despotic temper. He now felt self-convicted that the sole attachment or rather preference of which he had been ever conscious, was for one who charmed him chiefly as an uncomplaining domestic victim. Nor could anything be more certain than that the strong interest he was beginning to feel in the fate of Mary Hargood, arose in the first instance from the sight of her quiet resignation.

"There never *will* be a Mrs. Mark Davenport," he replied, in a more pacific tone,—"unless, when King Hugh comes to the throne, he choose to allot a cottage and cow's grass to

his poor dog of a younger brother, for the maintenance of a brood of young barbarians; or unless his reigning majesty of Ilford will sanction my surrendering my sword, like Sterne's Marquis, and taking up a yard measure or a camel's-hair brush,—which my father seems to hold in the same light, as equally badges of trade.—But even if there *were*, I know no one more likely than myself to be a hen-pecked husband —It is the common fate of great heroes,—from Mark Antony and Marlborough, to Mark Me."

"The very man for a Jerry Sneak, certainly!" replied his brother, surveying him with a smile, overjoyed to see him lapsing into good humour. Whereas I,—whom you sometimes insolently characterise as the meekest man, after Moses, pretend to be, in married life, a very Bruin.—I am by no means one of those who proclaim the equality of the sexes."

"It is somewhat too early in the day,—(and a little too late at night) to enter into the great question of White Slave Abolition," rejoined

Mark, convinced that, in the hope of changing the argument, his brother was giving utterance to sentiments foreign to his own. And in order to release him from his false position, he began to discuss otter-hunting in all its branches, and their friend Harley's pack in particular, till the waning of the candles in their sconces warned them to rest.

An early opportunity, however, was seized by Marcus for putting to the test the feelings of his sorrowing mother towards her brother's family.

"Hugh endeavours to heal her wounded heart with balsams and unguents," argued he. "*I* will try the probe, and astringents. Momentary torture sometimes produces lasting cure."

When therefore, a few days after his arrival, the illness of Olivia's governess, a kind-hearted elderly German who had attended her from childhood, gave rise to the momentous question of a successor, in case Madame Winkelried's indisposition should necessitate her retirement from office, Marcus took occasion to suggest

to his mother, whom he was driving in her pony-phaeton through the park, that it was time his sister should be placed under more intellectual tutorage than that of the motherly old Franconian.

"Who is nevertheless a mine of information," replied Lady Davenport; "and who has taught her almost all it is necessary for a woman to know, without allowing her to acquire an idea or feeling which it would be desirable a woman should forget."

"Still, it would be pleasanter for a girl so nearly on the verge of womanhood to have a more congenial companion. I suspect, mother, that solicitude for myself and Hugh had some share in your choice of Olivia's governess? You were afraid of a second snake in the grass, —a second Mary Hargood?"

Lady Davenport was silent for some minutes —not, as her son supposed, from embarrassment, but from profound emotion.

"No fear of my encountering on this side the grave a second Mary Hargood," said she at length, in faltering accents. "If there ever

lived a perfect being, Mark, it was she. To maintain her widowed mother, she undertook duties which ought not to have been made what they were, in my father's house.—For while to *me* she was the fondest of friends, as well as best of instructresses, every opportunity was afforded by my parents for the growth of that affection between her and poor Mark, which ripened into a frantic passion.—He was wild, wayward — a spendthrift — a prodigal. They wanted to reclaim him. They wanted to attach him to home. They wanted to preserve himself and his patrimony from utter ruin. And at whose cost?—At that of the poor little governess, whose beauty and talents were to attract him to the dull fireside he had hitherto shunned for gayer scenes."

"And they succeeded?" inquired Mark, with unspeakable interest—finding his mother, overpowered by her feelings, pause for breath.

"They succeeded. My brother was always with us—what an acquisition to Mary—what an acquisition to me! How happy we all

three were together!—How doubly pleasant were the woods and fields of Meadowes Court—dear, dear old Meadowes Court!"—

And again, she paused and wept.

"And did you never suspect, mother, the state of feeling of your companions?"

"Never. To my shame be it spoken, Mark, I inherited the notion, then universal in our class of society, that governesses, however endowed, and however attractive,—were a prohibited caste;—parias, with whom alliance was as impossible as with negroes or Red Indians."

"Had he confided to you then that he was *in love* with Mary Hargood, you would have shrunk from it as from something indecent, or the avowal of a crime!"

"I was never put to the trial. He never did confide it to me. I knew nothing on the subject till the discovery had been made by my mother, and Mary expelled the house."

"And you gave up your friend without a struggle!—Oh! mother!"—

"Ah! my dear Mark,—if you only knew

how little any effort of mine would have availed her cause. What you term a struggle,—that is a remonstrance with my parents,—would have been called rebellion, and denounced as the result of her evil lessons."

Mark Davenport unconsciously shrugged his shoulders.

"I did hope," she resumed, "hoped for years, that I might obtain sufficient influence over your father to induce him to favour a reconciliation."

Lord Davenport's undutiful son reasoned within himself that to endeavour to soften his lordship's stubborn nature was about as hopeful a task as (to use Cowper's expression,) to 'clap a blister on the wooden pate of a wig-block.'

"But a thousand circumstances combined against me," continued his mother. "Mary had a wrong-headed brother, who stirred up coals of discord · a violent man—a violent writer—a democrat—who seemed to take delight in irritating and disgusting the family. Then,

my poor dear brother himself did a thousand vexatious things to widen the breach "

"And you literally, from the day of rupture till now, never beheld them again?"

"I could not have done so, unless in defiance of your father's will, by journeying down to Meadowes Court. From the day of his marriage, my brother abjured London, as a place in which he had no longer a part."

"Wise man!—Happy man!"—

"Thank God, he *was* happy—which is the best proof of his wisdom, or of any one's wisdom," said Lady Davenport. "I believe no one ever led a more contented life."

"But why so sure of it, since no communication ever took place between you?"

"A sister of Lady Louisa Eustace resides within a couple of miles of Meadowes Court; and through them, I have heard frequently of my brother and his wife—"

"Lady Louisa Eustace," repeated Mark, musingly, as if endeavouring to recal the name to his mind.

"The Eustaces of Horndean Court. Sir Henry is an old schoolfellow of your father, and Lady Louisa one of Lord Davenport's few favourites. He told me the other day that there was something of a project between them to marry Olivia to their son."

"Olivia?—That *child!*"—

"You forget how time runs on. Next year, she will be presented. But I trust many more will pass before I am called upon to resign her to a husband; above all, to one of any other person's choosing than her own."

"And these Eustaces are friends of poor Lady Meadowes?"

"They have never even seen her. But Lady Harriet Warneford, Lady Louisa's sister, resides at Radensford Manor House; and through her and them, the first intelligence reached me of my brother's death."

"And what of his widow? Surely mother, you have written to her?"

"I resolved to do so,—I made the attempt. But every word that came to my pen seemed like an insult to my brother's memory. To

have remained silent so long; and then, the moment he was laid in the grave, burst through all prohibitions to address her who had been the cause of the estrangement between us! — There was something unnatural in it, Mark."

"On the contrary. It was all the atonement you could offer to his memory. What was unnatural in it? Nothing that is humane, mother, can ever be unnatural."

"I felt that, in Mary's place, I should return the letter unopened. In short, dear Mark, I *dared* not write."

"Oh! that miserable moral cowardice! What fools, and sometimes what knaves it makes of us!" sighed Mark Davenport.

"Had she required aid or assistance from me, it would have been another thing," pleaded his mother. But "Lady Meadowes is very well off. She and her child inherit the Meadowes Court estate,—more than two thousand a-year. I have little doubt that the partial reconciliation I should be able to propose, (for your father would never be a party to it,) would be painful

and embarrassing to her rather than otherwise."

"Not if she be the kind and perfect being you have described. At all events, mother, for the ease of your own conscience, make the attempt."

Lady Davenport gravely shook her head. Their drive was drawing to a termination. They were within view of Ilford Castle, with all its dreary associations of marital and paternal authority. The iron gauntlet of the domestic tyrant seemed again pressing upon her neck, and bending down her spirit.

"Then let *me* !"

"*You*, Mark ?"

"Let me write, or better still, let me go—"

"To a person you have never seen ?—A place you have never visited ?"—

"Why not,—if I visit it in your name, as a messenger of peace ?"

"And your father ?"—

"My father troubles himself very little about

my movements, unless when he has to pay for them. He need not be apprised of *this*."

"I have no secrets from him, Mark."

"*I* have many. If I venture to behave myself like a Christian towards my aunt and cousin-—"

"Hush, hush!—for *Heaven's* sake hush!" whispered Lady Davenport,—for they had now entered the court-yard.

"I shall of course do it with a mental reservation; like the young Irish lady who went through the marriage ceremony, adding to each response, 'provided my father gives his consent.'"

Hugh Davenport noticed with delight, that day at dinner, that his mother's eyes looked far less heavy than usual; and Olivia, who rarely ventured to utter an opinion in her father's presence, took courage to say that she was sure her mother's drive in the open carriage with Marcus, had done her good:—a remark which deepened the faint tinge of colour on her ladyship's pallid cheek.

Lord Davenport was of opinion, on the contrary, that her spirits must have been raised by the thriving aspect of his farm. But Marcus could not help hoping that his darling mother felt gratified by a project which she dared not openly sanction. Who can say which was the true surmise!—The secrets of that harassed heart lay betwixt herself and Heaven!

CHAPTER XV.

Love is your only modern alchemist:—transmutation of character being the substitute for transmutation of metals. Love, which had rendered the self-seeking William Eustace humble, was already rendering the frank, reckless Mark Davenport cautious and sage.

Instead of rushing off the following day to fulfil his promise to himself and his mother of visiting Meadowes Court, he judged it prudent not to incense Lord Davenport by disappointing his expectations of completing his family circle at Ilford, during the Christmas holidays.

It was one of the old customs to which he clung as to a duty,—a duty towards Public Opinion. His fat cattle were slain,—his strong beer broached,—his offspring collected under his roof. And if their mirthfulness were a little dashed by the overclouding of parental authority, or diluted by a copious admixture of paternal prose, the county paper, which duly announced their Christmas festivities, was none the wiser.

So poor Marcus stayed, and listened. Lord Davenport condescended to notice to Hugh that never had he seen his younger son so companionable or so rational. And as the for once self-governed Mark was able to occupy his mornings to his satisfaction, by giving lessons in his favourite art to his interesting young sister, the four weeks of his sentence to what *he* called the House of Correction, passed far less tediously than he had expected. Association with three natures so gentle and refined as those of his mother, his brother and the timid Olivia, had almost tamed the wild elephant by the time he started for the South.

February had set in, bright and sunny; as that most deceptious month occasionally does, as if to add unnecessary bitterness to the biting blasts of its successor; and never perhaps in his life had Marcus been conscious of such elasticity of spirits as when progressing with his dog and portmanteau from those beautiful dales, where *he* saw only scenes worthy the pencil of Turner or Lee, and Lord Davenport only wilds to be converted by the appliance of patent manure,—towards the sunny banks of the Severn.

He fancied himself on the eve of a new era of his existence. He was about to redress an injury. He was about, like some hero of the antique world, to propitiate Heaven by atonement for an ancestral crime. What more he purposed or anticipated, it matters little to inquire. For so prone are we to deceive ourselves, that, had he been asked whether the pacification of Hargood had any share in his movements, he would have replied by a negative as indignant as usually forms the response to questions convicting us as impostors.

Marcus had despatched his active and assiduous servant straight from Ilford Castle to town; for over active and assiduous servants are apt to prove as troublesome appendages as inquisitive friends. He was consequently responsible to no one for the erratic nature of his movements; nor was there a single prying eye to notice that his hand shook strangely while making his elaborate toilet at Cardington, previous to entering the fly about to convey him to Meadowes Court:—the home of his mother's childhood,—the stronghold of her time-honoured race.

"What would I give that this visit had taken place in the lifetime of my poor old uncle!" said he, as he surveyed the wide pastures dividing Cardington from Radensford, so exciting to the eye of the fox-hunter. "How I should have liked the jolly old sportsman; who appears to have sown and reaped his wild oats in a single harvest: and to have had but one mind during the remainder of his life. A great thing that! To be what the French call *tout d'une pièce* is, in my opinion, a

substantial virtue. We should have agreed famously. As my father said, I *am* a Meadowes at heart."

Still, it was not too late. The amiable wife and charming daughter remained; and though he could not hope to enjoy with *them* the capital runs and famous partridge-shooting whereof the materials lay around him, it was something that he could offer to these living relatives the expressions of his regard and deference for him they had lost.

In passing hurriedly through Radensford, he noted the old lichen-stained lodge leading to the Manor House; and the Rectory, with its trim shrubbery of laurels. The cottages looked wholesome and cheerful. The country did not wear that constrained aspect of the highly-farmed environs of Ilford;—clearly belonging to a proprietor who regarded the kindly fruits of the earth but as the means of increasing the balance of his banker's book, or creating an ideal capital in that misty and mysterious abyss of property, called Public Securities.

"My poor mother! What a change for her,

from this pleasant open country to the narrow horizon of Ilford," thought Marcus, as at length, through a glade in the forest of Burdans already brightened by patches of yellow gorse, which in the distance gleamed like scatterings of sunshine, he discovered the outline of the old family mansion.

And lo! a few minutes more conveyed him to Meadowes Court.—To his utter dismay, he saw that the window-shutters were closed, and the chimneys smokeless!—

"How is this?" said he to the driver, who seemed to hesitate about pulling the bell, which probably there was no one to answer. "Is not the family here?"

"Sir Jervis ben't a come yet, Sir. They do say he ben't a coming. Master heerd a talk as the place war to be let; and that there'd been priest folk from Bristol, a looking a'ter it, to make what's called a Summin-hairy."

"But Lady Meadowes and her daughter?"

"*Hev'* Sir Jervis ever a lady, Sir?—"

"The widow of the late Sir Mark—"

"Oh! the widder, Sir. Pity but what you'd

mentioned it afore you left Card'nt'n. She's gun away for good an' all. Went jist afore Christmas, Sir. There's been a sale here, sin' then; which brought all the gentlefolk of the keounty for twenty mile round."

If any one averse to profane swearing had been just then within earshot, Mark Davenport might have risked both fine and remonstrance. He was vexed beyond measure,—beyond measure disappointed. His feelings had been wound up to a pitch of excitement and expectation, from which it was difficult for a being so unreasonable to fall with decency.

"But *whither* was the widow gone,—and where was her daughter?"

Ah! *that* the flyman didn't pretend to know. And he began zealously pulling at the door bell, in hopes of amending his ignorance. For some time, their united efforts produced no result. No venerable Nichols appeared, as aforetime, with sable suit and a poll like that of Polonius;—no bumpkin footman, wearing the Meadowes' livery as proudly as though it were the pyed surcoat of the Montmorencys. A

slatternly servant-girl peeped sulkily through the half-opened door, of which she had found the chain too hard to unbolt; one of those blighted slips of human nature, which nothing but a house-agent or lodging-house keeper ever contrives to rake out of the human rubbish-heap.

To a reiteration of Captain Davenport's queries respecting Lady Meadowes, she had no answer to afford. Of the late family, she knew nothing. She and a deaf old mother were engaged by the attorney of the present proprietor, to take care of the empty walls of the old mansion, till something should be arranged respecting its occupancy. To his request to "see the house," she replied that it was "all shut up;" and though a handsome gratuity eventually enlightened her mind as to the possibility of opening the shutters, she did her spiriting, in the operation, far more like a Caliban than an Ariel.

Now if there be one spot on earth more cheerless than another, it is a house from which the furniture has been hastily removed, and

which has never been cleared up since its dismantlement. The old low-browed hall, at the best of times gloomy, was now sprinkled over with loose straw and shreds of packing-paper. A mouldy mildewed smell prevailed in the untidy passages. All was damp and chilling as in a family vault.—The walls of the best apartments were discoloured by the removal of pictures. In many places, the paper was torn; in others, long knotted cords were left hanging where pictures had been taken down. Cobwebs were pendent from the fretted ceilings; and on the dirty oaken floors, lay shreds of matting, lids of packing-cases, torn newspapers,—all that was shabby and unseemly.

As the little slovenly maid of all work proceeded to open the shutters and admit the tell-tale brightness of the midday sun, Marcus was almost tempted to bid her close them again. If *this* was Meadowes Court, he had seen enough of it.

The girl insisted, however,—as if she thought her fee would otherwise be unhandsomely earned, —on escorting him through the house —and

though his disgusts and mortification increased at every step, he was pleased for a moment by the light and pretty hangings of the room designated as "Miss's," adjoining the vast old oak-wainscoted apartment of "my lady."

"And was the whole furniture sold, then?" he inquired,—as he looked from the wide Elizabethan windows over the well-timbered paddock.

"A'most all," she believed. "Everything had been removed afore she came. Muster Preston, the lawyer, know'd all about it, and could tell where the ladies was to be heerd on."

To the lawyers, therefore, whose address she communicated, Marcus was fain to refer himself for further information; and cheerless indeed was his drive back to Cardington, with a tired horse and grumbling driver,—all three frustrated in their expectations. No longer surveying the landscape with the eye of a fox-hunter or an artist, Marcus rolled himself up like a hedgehog in a corner of the fly; swearing at the climate,—the county, the country,—and occasionally including himself and all his members in his imprecations.

His good intentions towards his mother's family, however, flagged not. Though, as far as he knew, the widow might have deserted Meadowes Court from distaste for the spot, or for a country life, he was not yet out of conceit with his unknown relative. To his imaginative mind, she was still the gentle Mary Hargood of other days; and he determined to follow her, and persist in his projects, if she and her daughter were to be found within limit of the kingdom.

But if the feelings of the young soldier, a comparative stranger, were thus deeply touched by the desolation of the venerable *Stamm-Haus* of the Meadowes family, what must have been the grief of poor little Amy on witnessing the desecration of their lares and penates!—In all her plans and resolutions, the conduct of Lady Meadowes had been regulated by regard for the future interests of her daughter. Placing her own predilections entirely out of the question, she did not allow herself to retain a single object or article that could be advantageously disposed of for the benefit of the little

fund that was to form her daughter's future dependence. At first, indeed, the advisers of Sir Jervis had suggested that much of the property,— such as plate and pictures,— was heir-loom. But of this, he could produce no evidence; and the Will of Sir Mark, bequeathing his personalty specifically to his widow, was eventually established.

From that day, Lady Meadowes sanctioned the preliminaries of the sale by auction which was to clear the premises for their new proprietor; and with the exception of their personal belongings, and a small case of miniatures of no intrinsic value, all was speedily ticketed and destined to the hammer.— It had been the earnest desire of both mother and daughter to escape from the scene of confusion before their sacred haunts were invaded. But this was impossible. The inclemency of the weather rendered perilous the immediate removal of the invalid; and she had to endure the rough intrusion and coarse questioning of the auctioneer and his workmen, ere the doors closed upon her for ever.

She might have borne the trial with less firmness, but for the necessity of supporting the courage of the young girl thus driven from the home of her childhood.—In spite of her best intentions, in spite of old Mr. Henderson's fatherly exhortations, and old Burnaby's salutary chidings, Amy could not overcome her anguish of spirit. Her father's arm-chair,—her father's writing-table,—her father's trophies of the chase,—his old pet books,—his rack of hunting-whips,—his favourite drinking-cup,—how could she bear to see them dragged about and contemptuously turned over by the hands of hirelings! His morning room, still littered with his belongings, which neither she nor her mother,—nay, not even old Nichols—had ventured to enter since his coffin was carried out of it, was now thrown open to all comers; and a lawyer's clerk was seated with his hat on, taking an inventory of the scattered effects, at the table where that darling father used to sit, at his desk; while she hung over his shoulder, suggesting objects for his benevolence or modifying his magisterial

awards. Who can wonder that she rushed weeping to her mother's feet,—praying with almost convulsive gestures that at least *that* room might be spared, if only, *only* for another day !—

But this state of agitation could not be allowed to continue. Dr. Burnaby began to see that the health of the daughter was in greater jeopardy from delay, than that of the mother from precipitate removal. The executors undertook the whole charge and conduct of the sale; and by their advice, almost by their authority, Lady Meadowes and Amy, with a single attendant, were conveyed to the temporary lodgings at Clifton, secured for them by the good old doctor.

Both he and his coadjutor of the Rectory were a little puzzled, and still more grieved, by the coolness exhibited on the occasion by their neighbour at the Manor House. Lady Harriet had selected this unlucky moment to absent herself from home. The kindlier-hearted Rachel Burton indeed was unremitting in her endeavours to supply the place of this older friend; and even the Admiral's sententious niece was as

active in her attendance on them as the nervous state of her feelings would allow. But both were too deeply attached to Lady Meadowes and her daughter to find the task of consolation easy. While assisting their packing and cheering their departure, their own tears were a sad hindrance.

The old servants to be paid off and dispersed, — the favourite animals, even Blanche and Sting, to be discarded,—the faithful friends to be taken leave of,—the grave of the husband and father to be visited for the last time,—and then— But why dwell upon the details of that mournful exodus!—They went. — Their place remembered them no longer.—

Not Hagar, driven forth into the wilderness, was more desolate than they!—

END OF VOL. I.

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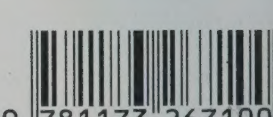

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